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SPACEWAY

JAN.,
1969

SCIENCE FICTION

50¢

HIM

by A. E. van Vogt

UNWANTED HERITAGE

by E. C. Tubb

THE GENTLE PEOPLE

by James Causey

LETHAL PLANETOID

by Harl Vincent

BLOCK PARTY

William S. Corwin

THE THIRD EMPIRE

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RADIO MINDS OF MARS

Ralph Milne Farley



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SPACEWAY

SCIENCE FICTION

Volume 4

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WM. L. CRAWFORD, Editor

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CURBS ON SCIENCE FICTION

At one time a great many science fiction stories were published involving the adventures of earthmen on other planets within our solar system. Lately we do not see many of these—at least, not in science fiction magazines. Most of our astronomers have come to regard the solar system as a wasteland where life as we know it can not exist. Since many of the buyers of s-f mags are scientists, they expect the material they read to conform to known facts and not fantasy. For this reason, interplanetary yarns of this type are becoming rare.

Actually the science of astronomy is simply *not* that accurate. Astronomers—particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—have been able to derive a fantastic amount of information from the few solid facts available, but a great deal of this has been theory and over the years theories are changed as more solid facts are learned.

For instance, just in the last few years concepts about some things are once again changing. At one time, it was believed that the outer "gas giants"—Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune—were "hot globes," almost miniature suns. Then came the discovery of the thermocouple and almost overnight the "hot globes" became frigid frozen wastelands, inconceivably hostile to life. Little thought, apparently, was given to the fact that the heat measurements were being taken from near the top of the atmosphere.

Then along came radar and the radio telescope. A few thoughtful astronomers began to reassess our concepts of the conditions on these worlds. Without going into the reasons for the change in thought, it can be stated that today there are some prominent astronomers who believe these outer planets are radiating enough internal heat to make the frozen wasteland concept a myth. Indeed, under the unquestionably cold top cloud layers, almost any temperature is possible, from earthlike up to several thousand degrees F., depending upon the depths and pressure of the overlaying gas layers. They also believe that somewhere within those dense atmospheres conditions suitable for the development of life may exist, either in the atmosphere or on the surface.

Another example of the non-infallibility of the science of astronomy, or rather of the interpretations placed on it, can be

found in the planet Mercury. For many years you could open any textbook on astronomy and find, in essence, the following: Mercury—a tiny globe, too small and too close to the sun to retain any vestiges of atmosphere. The period of rotation is so synchronized with its revolution about the sun that one side eternally faces that blazing furnace (four to ten times the apparent size of Sol seen from earth) on which the temperature is hot enough to melt lead. The other side of this little world is perpetually exposed to the bitter cold and darkness of interplanetary space, its temperature never rising more than a few degrees above absolute zero, giving Mercury the distinction of being both the hottest and the coldest spot in the solar system. Only a small segment of the planet, known as the twilight zone, can experience both light and darkness. Here the sun *wobbles* above and below the horizon, due to the varying orbital speed as the planet swings in toward and away from the sun.

Just how much of this earlier guessology is correct is now difficult to say. Recent radar measurements have shown that Mercury rotates in 59 days, not 88. Thus all parts of the globe are exposed to the sun at some time, and its year is approximately one and one half days in length. Several astronomers *have* detected an atmosphere, perhaps not a dense one, but an atmosphere. Amazingly, the Russian astronomer Kozyrev contends the bulk of this atmosphere is hydrogen. This is in about the same category as claiming the moon is made of green cheese, since hydrogen is the one gas Mercury could not be expected to keep for any time at all. The answer? Very simple. Mercury's hydrogen atmosphere is constantly being replenished by stray molecules from the sun. While this may or may not be a fact, it is certainly an excellent example of what can happen when too much dependence is placed upon conclusions drawn from incomplete data.

To cap the list of new upsetting findings in regard to this elusive little planet, an English astronomer claims to have secured temperature measurements of the dark side by radar. A degree or two above absolute zero? Not exactly. More like a balmy earthlike sixty or seventy degrees F.

In any event, in SPACEWAY we shall try to bring you "balanced" fiction. We will try not to transgress known facts, but we will not turn down a good story because it violates an unproven assumption.

¶ Man's creed: If it threatens you, kill it! had carried him from a fear-crazed animal crouching in a cave to the conquest of space. But in the steaming jungles of Venus he found that this was an

Unwanted Heritage

A NOVELET

By E. C. TUBB

ILLUSTRATED BY ROY HUNT

THEY were punishing a man that morning.

He stood facing the stockade, hands lashed to metal rings hammered into the raw wood above his head. His back was bare, sweat running in rivulets down the white skin, soaking into the khaki of his shorts. He looked sullen, defiantly staring at the exotic grain of the wood before his eyes.

Major Harrison planted stocky legs firmly on the soft loam of the compound, grasped both hands behind him, cleared his throat with a single harsh sound.

"Men," he snapped. "I regret the necessity for this punishment as much as you do, yet discipline must be maintained." He stared sharply at the assembled garrison, letting his narrowed eyes drift over the little group of civilian technicians standing to one side.

"Lassiter knew what he was doing. He knew the punishment for his crime. I had warned him. I have warned you all." Again his hooded eyes rested on the civilians. "Some of you may think the punishment too severe; I cannot agree. Any man who willingly associates with animals, must be expected to be treated like one."

The man lashed to the stockade stiffened, half turned his head, then shrugged and resumed his former position.

Harrison glanced at him. "What Lassiter did is known to you all. I shall not repeat it," contempt thickened his harsh tones. He nodded towards a sergeant. "Proceed!"

A medic stepped forward, his shirt dark with sweat, the blood-red



insignia of rank sewn to one sleeve. Rapidly he swabbed the naked back with antiseptic, stepped back. The sergeant reluctantly approached, swung the crude whip.

"One!" the thong slapped dully against the bare flesh.

"Two!" he muttered. "Three! Four!"

"Harder man," snapped Harrison. "Put some life into it. Remember why he's being punished. Strike harder!"

The sergeant bit his lip, made the lash whistle through the air.

"Seven! Eight! Nine!"

"Harder," grated Harrison. "Harder still!"

Beneath the cutting blows, a pattern of criss-cross welts grew. Crimson came to the pale skin, the long thin cuts oozing blood. Grimly, Lassiter bit his lips, the muscles of arms and shoulders standing out in sharp relief beneath the smooth white skin.

"Eighteen! Nineteen! Twenty!"

Thankfully the sergeant lowered the whip, wiped sweat from face and neck. Harrison grunted, nodded to the medic. He sprang forward, swabbed the wounds free of blood, sprayed on the collodion antiseptic.

Lassiter hadn't murmured during the flogging, but beneath the savage bite of the plastic dressing he whitened, strained madly at his bonds, then slumped in a dead faint. Phlegmatically the medic finished covering the wounds with the spray. Finally satisfied, he freed Lassiter's hands, supporting the sagging body against his own.

"Leave him," snapped Harrison.

"But the man is sick, sir," protested the medic.

"Leave him. When he recovers put him on normal duty. His pain may teach him that I mean what I say." For a moment Harrison teetered on the balls of his feet, hands clasped behind him, narrowed eyes darting along the ranks of the garrison. Abruptly he spun on his heel, strode away.

The medic watched him, his lips moving soundlessly. He glanced at the sergeant, shrugged, gently laid the unconscious man face down on the soft loam.

An officer bawled a sharp command. Two hundred men stiffened, jerked to attention, shouldered their arms. Further bawled orders. Like marionettes the ranked men split, swung into smooth motion, marched across the compound. The gates opened as they approached, swung behind them. Sentries commenced their slow circuit of the stockade, eyes probing the distance.

The little group of civilians watched the easy movements of military drill, glanced uncomfortably at each other, avoided the huddled figure on the ground. They, too, moved away, some to their laboratories housed in the low wooden huts, others back to their bunks.

The compound grew deserted but for the lone figure against one wall. After awhile he staggered to his feet, rested against the rough timbers a moment, wincing at the pain from his back, then stumbled painfully away.

A bird, scaly necked, leather winged, soared on fitful thermal currents, watching the scene below with curiously bright eyes. It wheeled, flapped rustling wings, then it too was gone.

The choking heat of the Venusian morning rolled across the deserted compound.

* * * * *

Ken Drayton looked up with sudden annoyance at the click of the door. Harrison, florid face streaming sweat, entered, kicked the flimsy panel shut behind him, slumped into a chair.

"I didn't see you this morning," he grunted. "Why not?"

Ken sighed, deliberately closed the file he had been studying, and turned to face the Commander. "I told you my reasons yesterday. Need I repeat them?"

"I issued a general order. All personnel to watch Lassiter's punishment. As Commander I expect my orders to be obeyed. Why didn't you attend?"

"I didn't want to," Ken said calmly. He raised a hand to stem the stream of abuse he expected. "Before you say another word, remember this. I am a civilian. A field psychologist. You are in full charge of the military, I in charge of the civilian technicians. I have tried to avoid friction between us, but I'll tell you this. One more such spectacle as this morning, and I forbid my technicians to obey you again. You can shame your own men; I won't have you shaming mine."

"Shame?" Harrison jerked upright in his chair. "What the devil do you mean? How else do you expect me to maintain discipline? I've over two hundred men in my command. They must obey orders. How else can I enforce them unless there is fear of punishment?"

"True," Ken nodded. "But why the whip?"

"Why not? It's quick, easy to administer, and does not weaken

the strength of the garrison by detailing guards to watch a prisoner."

"I see," Ken watched him curiously. "You really believe that, don't you?"

Harrison pursed thin lips, the hooded eyes lowering beneath a perpetual frown. With his short grizzled hair, the ramrod straightness of his back, he looked every inch the professional soldier that he was.

"I do," he snapped curtly.

"You know what will happen now, of course," Ken mused. "You have shamed Lassiter, shamed him beyond bearing. Even you, with your limited knowledge of psychology must be able to foresee the inevitable result."

Harrison gestured impatiently. "Lassiter is a soldier. He will accept the punishment and be all the better for it."

"Will he? What after all was his terrible crime? I tell you that there isn't a man in your command who doesn't sympathize with him."

"He disobeyed my orders," Harrison insisted stubbornly.

"Wrong orders."

"No. Orders designed to safeguard the lives of us all."

"Nonsense," Ken snorted. He glowered at the stocky commander, his long slightly saturnine face registering his disgust. "We've been here almost three years, and in all that time there has not been one instance of hostile action."

"Naturally. My men have seen to that."

"You think so?" Ken glowered at the file before him. "Aren't you rather overrating your power? Two hundred men with limited ammunition and fire-power against a whole planet. We could have been wiped out anytime during the past three years. We haven't been."

"Nevertheless, my orders stand. There will be no fraternization with the animal life of this planet."

"You fool!" Ken exploded. "Why are you so blind? Animal life! Why anyone can see that the natives are human. If we are to get anywhere at all we must have contact. Lassiter could have given us that. He is the only one of us all who has ever spent more than a few minutes with a Venusian," he grimaced. "And you have to whip him for it."

"Animal life," repeated Harrison doggedly. "They may look slightly human, that I'll admit, but think a moment. We are on

Venus. A totally new world. How can the native life be anything near human?" He shook his head. "They are no more human than monkeys or apes are human. I won't have any man of my command cheapening himself and disgusting his comrades by associating with them. That is your job."

"Is it?" Ken smiled grimly. "Listen Harrison. I'll make a prophecy. Lassiter was one of the first arrivals, wasn't he? That means he's been here several years without the company of a woman. I've been watching him. I've noticed the general deterioration of morale. Lassiter isn't the only one, and I noticed the change in him after he met this native. A woman wasn't it?"

"A female," agreed Harrison. He looked his disgust. "He said that he met it while on patrol; he had stopped to adjust his equipment. It came from the jungle; for some weird reason they continued to meet. How he managed it I don't know, but it's stopped now."

Ken frowned; he noted Harrison's determination not to admit humanity to the natives, even in designation of sex." Not for the first time he felt intense frustration at the unworkable dual command forced on them both. He tried to hide his anger.

"Lassiter was bored, miserable, unhappy. He hated the relentless routine of conditions here; it wouldn't be going too far to say that he was becoming a pathological case. Then he met this woman. Immediately he changed. He found comfort with the woman, a new life, a lessening of the pressure and strain. Then you had him flogged."

"I had warned him. I have warned them all."

"Maybe, but now what happens. He feels degraded. Life here has become even more unbearable. He needs comforting. Where else would he find that comfort but with the woman who has innocently been the cause of his trouble?" Ken thrust the folded file back into the cabinet.

"I predict that Lassiter will desert as soon as he is able."

Harrison laughed. He rocked in the flimsy chair, his still florid features convulsed with merriment. Ken eyed him with intense distaste.

"What's so funny?"

"He'll desert, will he?" Harrison chuckled. "How wrong you are," he wiped his eyes. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

"What?"

"How's he ever going to get back home?"
The door swung behind him.

* * * * *

Sergeant Bob Foster wiped sweat from his eyes, and peered into the dimly lit depths of the jungle. It was hot. The towering bulk of the fern like trees, wreathed with their garlands of vine and creeper, stretched on all sides. The path, beaten by continuous patrols, traced a thin line before them. Mechanically he plodded on.

For some reason he couldn't forget the episode of the morning. Lassiter, tied, flogged, treated like an animal. Unconsciously his hand curled, feeling again the butt of the crude whip. He hadn't wanted to flog Lassiter. He had protested, yielding only with the mental reservation to make the punishment as easy as possible. Harrison, damn him, had stopped that. He had cried for the sight of blood, and he'd had it.

An insect, brilliant winged, hovered with a faint drone above the path. Foster made a grab at it, and it jerked away with an angry hum. Ahead of him the patrol plunged their wooden way along the beaten track. They walked rather than marched, careless, almost listless, their weapons dangling loosely from slack hands.

Three years, he thought dully. Three years of utter waste, eternally prepared for a non-existent enemy. Day after day, the same routine patrol, the same manual labor. First it had been clearing the landing field, then erecting the barracks, then clearing the field again. Things grew on Venus. How they grew! Even the little truck gardens cultivated as a means of recreation by the garrison, bore exotic fruits and vegetables rare even in the tropics of Earth. Venus was a paradise, but what was paradise to Adam without Eve?

He wiped his face again, shifting the slim barreled Vennor to a more comfortable position. He thought of Lassiter again, this time with a sick envy. A woman to talk to. A real woman. Someone to smile at, to be tender to, perhaps even to touch.

He stopped, listening to the faint dying sounds made by the patrol ahead of him. From a sweat soaked pocket of his shirt he pulled a wallet. Carefully he slid out a creased and tattered slip of paper. For awhile he stared at the photograph, his lips tightening with sudden exasperation. His wife, and she hadn't even written for the past three supply rockets. With sudden anger he twisted

the photograph to pulp, flung it aside. It fell in a clump of rank growths; he watched it moodily, searching his pockets for a ration cigarette.

The smoke calmed him—that, and the quiet almost cathedral like atmosphere of the towering trees and the dimly lit jungle. He stretched, snubbed out the cigarette, carefully salvaging the butt. Vennor in one hand he lurched to his knees, half rolled, straightened—and froze in sudden immobility.

A woman stood in the path.

Tall, with a wealth of fine hair spilling from her forehead, rippling down her back. A single garment of some silken fabric, looped over one shoulder, draped under one arm, fell in soft full folds to just below her knees. Her arms were bare, her feet covered in crude sandals of what seemed to be bark. The dim light filtering through the thick jungle touched her hair, giving the startling first impression that she wore a halo.

A Venusian!

She had seen him, Foster knew. Carefully he stepped toward her, the Vennor deliberately pointing at the ankle thick loam of the jungle floor.

"Hello," he said, and smiled.

She didn't answer. Foster swallowed hard, extended his empty hand. "Friend," he said. "Earthman." He touched his chest. "Bob."

Still no answer. Still she stood calmly before him, the wide eyes staring vaguely at a point just above his head. Carefully he stepped closer. Despite himself ugly thoughts reared in the back of his mind. Native or not, she was woman. They were alone, and it had been a long time, such a long time.

Finally the woman acknowledged his presence. Her face twisted a little, with an expression strangely like disgust; she flickered, and somehow was standing just off the path. Desperately he followed her, hating himself for his own involuntary thoughts.

"Please," he begged. "Don't go away. Just let me talk to you. I know that you can't understand a word I'm saying, but at least let me see you again."

In the half light of the jungle her fantastically white skin seemed to glow with an inner light. Her hair, blonde to the point of colorless, clouded behind her. The wide staring eyes had a reddish tinge. From somewhere down the path a voice called, the patrol returning to look for him. Bitterly he cursed, and stepped nearer to the woman.

"I must go now," he said slowly and distinctly. "You be here tomorrow," he pointed to where the sun shone through the clouds in a great patch of golden light. He swept his arm in a circle, pointed at the sun again. "This time tomorrow. Understand?" He pointed at his chest, then at her, swept his arm in a circle again, then stabbed it at the ground between them.

"Tomorrow."

He stepped back onto the path, the Vennor unconsciously menacing the approaching patrol.

* * * * *

Ken sat moodily in the crowded recreation hut, letting the whirling blades of the fan try to cool his skin. Automatically he swallowed several salt pills, washing them down with tepid water. It was night. The gates of the compound were locked; only the patrolling guards, cursing the insect laden darkness of their eternal march, stirred. All the rest were miserably trying to get comfortable in the stifling humidity.

Wilson, the biologist, slumped into a vacant chair beside him. Ken grunted a greeting. "Anything new?"

"New? Of course there is. There always will be for the next hundred years. How long do you think it takes to classify a planetful of specimens?"

"Sorry," apologized Ken with a wry grin. "I didn't mean exactly that."

"I know what you meant," sighed Wilson. "And the answer is the same. If we could only contact the natives, enlist their aid, it would make things so much easier." He clenched a fist, the knuckles whitening beneath the strain; he looked at it curiously. "You know, Drayton, sometimes I get the strangest feeling."

"Yes?" encouraged Ken.

Wilson laughed. "Always on the job, aren't you? Always watching our reactions; I can't say that I blame you; Harrison's not much help."

Ken grunted noncommittally.

"Have you ever felt as if you'd like to smash things?" Wilson asked. "You know what I mean, like as if you've been trying to make something for a long time, and it keeps going wrong; finally you smash it and the feeling is wonderful."

"I know what you mean."

"Do you?" Wilson grinned self consciously. "I wish I did. I feel like that now. All this," he gestured at the night outside, "all this is too big for us. There's too much to learn, too much to do. A whole new world, and we can't even get started. Sometimes I feel as if I'd like to smash it, and go back home."

"Why don't you?"

"And regret it for the rest of my life?" Wilson shook his head. "No. It's too great a challenge. Every day I find something new, every day the mystery deepens."

"Mystery?"

"Of course," Wilson relaxed his hand. "Think of it a moment. Venus geologically speaking is in the Mesozoic period: there should be Dinosauria—and no men. Instead we find no Dinosauria, and natives that act like no natives I've ever seen before. It's out of my line, but isn't it the rule that primitive peoples always show curiosity?"

"Harrison regards the native life as animal," Ken said drily. "Animals are to a certain extent, unpredictable."

"That's nonsense," blurted Wilson angrily. "Animals don't wear clothes. I've seen the natives, not often—no one has seen them often—but a few times at least. They are human." He clenched his fist again. "If I could only examine one," he breathed. "If only they would let me examine one of their dead."

"Don't mention that to Harrison," Ken said sharply. "He may send out a hunting party."

"Of course not, but it would answer so many problems."

"Maybe," Ken answered curtly. He was growing tired of the conversation. Like most specialists he couldn't understand fanatic interest in any field but his own. His interest in the natives was purely psychological. He wanted to know why they had ignored the Earthmen, why they had refused any form of contact. But the thought of dissecting one was repugnant.

Yet it would answer the major problem. Were they human, fantastic as the possibility sounded, or were they, as Harrison insisted, merely animals with alien ways? When first the expedition had landed the riotous growth of what had loosely been called the jungle had made the crews wary. They had imagined great beasts, savage alien life; they hadn't found any, but what they did see had caused even greater alarm.

Human seeming shapes had been spotted at the edges of the clearing. They stood upright, wore clothes, seemed to be men. None had ever been captured; they had an uncanny knack of melting into the shielding growth of the jungle at the approach of search parties. For awhile sight of them had been common, then they had gone, but the damage had been done.

A world, geared to the highest pitch of militarism, had acted in the only way possible to a people steeped in thoughts of violence. Earthmen, desperate for new land, spurred by the tantalizing promise of a new paradise, had acted to safeguard the bridgehead. Two hundred men, armed with the deadliest portable weapons yet devised, had embarked for the new planet. For three years they had stood ready to defend the outpost. For three years they had patrolled the jungle. For three years they had expected sudden attack.

They were still waiting.

Grimly Ken wondered just how long they would be content to merely wait.

Sergeant Bob Foster tossed on his narrow cot, cursed the heat, the regulations that switched off all lights at too early an hour, the confines of the barrack hut.

He felt restless, the episode of the day remained too fresh in his mind. He sat up, fumbled for a cigarette, struck a light. Replacing the cigarettes his hand struck against the pocket containing his wallet. As he had done so often before, he opened it, groped for the tattered photograph, hoping to decipher it by the light from the glowing tip of his cigarette.

His fingers met emptiness, and he remembered his angry gesture while on patrol. Thought of one thing led to thought of another; within seconds he was reliving his meeting with the native woman.

She *was* human, he thought desperately. No animal could ever look like that. Logic, reason, the ingrained indoctrination of the past three years, all affirmed that there could be no humans on Venus. Instinct told him that there were. He had to know.

Carefully he slipped from the cot, donned shorts, fumbled his way to the connecting door. A voice muttered a sleepy question; he ignored it, felt his cautious way onwards. Behind him, a corporal felt curiously at his empty bed.

Lassiter wasn't asleep. The savage pain from his lacerated back wouldn't permit him to even rest in comfort. He lay, eyes staring

into the darkness, lips drawn into a thin line. Foster carefully touched his shoulder.

"What?"

"Hush. It's me, Foster. Sergeant Foster. I want to talk to you."

"Why?" bitterness echoed in the harsh whisper.

"I don't blame you for hating me, but you shouldn't. I couldn't help it; I had to do as ordered. If I hadn't, we'd have both been flogged."

"So logic justifies your action," Lassiter laughed harshly. "What do you want me to do, forgive you?"

"No," Foster dropped his voice even lower. "I want to ask you something; will you answer me?"

"How do I know yet? What is it?"

"You knew a native, didn't you? A Venusian. A female. Tell me, are they human?"

"Are you? Is Harrison?" Lassiter repeated dully.

"Never mind that. Tell me, are they human?"

"Ask Harrison," Lassiter moved carefully on the cot. "He will tell you, and believe me, a whip can be very convincing."

Foster sat numbly on the edge of the bed. He felt clammy, the sweat trickling down his body. "I saw one today," he said dully. "It was while on patrol. I'd stopped behind for a smoke; nothing ever happens on patrol anyway. She was standing in the path. I spoke to her. I want to see her again." Sudden anger shook him. "Damn you, Lassiter. You've got to help me. How did you arrange your meetings? How did you tell her that you wanted to see her again?"

"Do you?"

"Yes." It sounded like a prayer.

"I see," Lassiter sounded strange. "I can't help you, Foster. I feel sorry for you, but I can't help you."

"Why not? Can't you understand, Lassiter? Forget that I flogged you, forget that you hate me, forget everything but that I saw a woman, and I want to meet her more than anything else in the world."

"More than going home?"

Foster hesitated. "Must it mean that?"

"It may."

"I see." Dully he rose to his feet. "Thanks anyway. I'm sorry about this morning. Does it hurt bad?"

"It doesn't matter—now."

Foster looked down at the vague blackness against the dim patch of the sheet. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." He hesitated a moment, then fumbled his careful way back to the adjoining barrack room. Once he thought he heard a sound, the quick hiss of indrawn breath; for a moment he stood poised on one foot, eyes straining to penetrate the thick darkness. Finally he shrugged, grouped his way to his cot.

He was a long time falling asleep.

* * * * *

Ken sucked at an empty pipe, stared through the double wire mesh and plastic of the window, and frowned at the flimsy sheet of paper before him. Not for the first time he felt keenly the helplessness of his position. He had a dozen technicians in his charge; Harrison had two hundred men. The balance of power was ludicrous, and unworkable. Someone tapped on the door.

"Come in," Ken called. For once he was glad of an interruption. The doctor eased through the door, stared around the empty room.

"Sorry," he apologized, "I was looking for Lassiter. Have you seen him?"

"Lassiter?" Ken frowned. "No. Why should I have?"

"Well you're the psychologist; I'm only the doctor. I wanted to have a look at his back."

"I see," Ken nodded. "The man who was flogged. No, I haven't seen him. What made you think I had?"

"It's logical, isn't it? After what happened to him he'll be in need of psychological treatment. Modern treatment I mean, not the old type of 'spare the rod', etc."

Ken laughed. "I had let it slip my mind. Ask him to drop in when you've finished with him, will you?"

The doctor nodded, left the room; reluctantly Ken turned to his desk again. Abruptly the door jerked open, slammed shut. Harrison glared about the room.

"Where is he?"

"Who?" snapped Ken angrily.

"You know who. Lassiter. I guessed that he'd come whining to you for help. Where is he?"

"How the hell do I know?" Ken barked. "He's one of your men, not mine. What's the matter with him anyway?" Suddenly realization came. He stared at Harrison, and grinned sardonically. "He's deserted."

"No," blustered the red faced commander. "He wouldn't dare." He slumped into a chair. "We just can't find him," he added uncertainly.

"He's deserted," Ken repeated. "I warned you of what would happen. I was right. Lassiter's gone."

Harrison ran thick fingers through his grizzled hair. "Maybe you're right," he admitted. Anger swelled his neck. "I'll teach him. I'll flog the flesh from his bones. I'll work him until he drops. I'll refuse his passage back home." He bared his teeth. "There'll be no more desertions."

"Yes there will," Ken snapped. "This is only the beginning. I've noticed the drop in morale. Your men are getting homesick. Restless. Woman hungry. It only wants one successful example and they will filter away." He stared at the angry commander. "At least they will if they don't get a more intelligent Commanding Officer."

"What!"

For a moment Ken thought that Harrison would strike him. Unconsciously he tensed, leg muscles tightening, ready to whirl away from the expected blow.

"Steady," he snapped. "Listen to me. I warned you what would happen. You can't treat men as you have been without asking for trouble. Harsh discipline. Senseless routine patrols. The insistence of the inhumanity of the natives, when all their instincts tell them that you are wrong. Finally the flogging. Did you think that intelligent men—and they are intelligent—would accept that? By lowering one, you lowered them all. They feel guilty, ashamed; they hate themselves, but they need a scapegoat. You're the scapegoat."

"You fool!" Harrison sneered. "You utter fool! What do you know of men? You only know diseased minds. I've handled men all my life. Soldiered in a dozen countries. I know how to handle them. Discipline! Discipline and more discipline. Keep them busy. Keep them from thinking too much. It was good enough for three years; it will be good enough for a further two."

"No," protested Ken. "No."

"What do you know about it? You and your petty handful of sickly technicians? We can conquer Venus without you. We will conquer Venus."

"I see," said Ken. He slumped back into his chair, anger draining away as understanding came. "You poor fool! You poor blind fool!" Abruptly a siren wailed across the compound.

The radio officer threw them a quick grin as they tumbled into his shack. Overhead the umbrella of the radar beam swung a little as he delicately touched the controls.

"They're early this time," he grunted absently. "Didn't expect them for a week. Nearly surprised me out of my skin when I heard the radio call."

"How far out?" snapped Harrison.

"Not far. Within five hundred at least. Hard to tell."

Ken sighed. Sitting at the door of the low hut he stared hard at the solid sheet of thick cloud, eternally shielding the planet. He didn't envy the crew of the approaching ship. For the last part of their journey they traveled blind, only the intermittent signals of the radio beam guiding them to the landing field.

A mutter grew in the air, high up, like a distant roll of thunder. The compound was full of men, the stockade echoing to the sharp sounds of yelled commands. Order grew from chaos. Smoothly the men assembled, split into groups, marched from the compound. Dispersal. The only safeguard in case something went wrong.

Ken wished that his group were as mobile. The technicians had gone of course, but the laboratories, the precious equipment, the files, specimens, all the fruit of months of grinding work, could not be moved. Ken shuddered as he thought of the debacle a slight error of judgment could cause.

High above, trembling on the very edge of visibility, a second sun came into being. A splotch of light, widening, golden through the twisting clouds. The eye searing flare of rocket tubes.

It came nearer, nearer. Sound grew. Thundering, screaming against the stockade, pressing with almost physical force against the tensely watching men. Something broke from the lower limit of the clouds. Slipped aside a little. Roared a flaring note of power, and fell abruptly silent.

The radio man wiped a streaming forehead.

"Everytime they come in I feel as if I want to run," he complained to no one in particular.

Harrison breathed a deep sigh. With quick strides he moved across the compound, heading towards the orderly room. More curious, Ken joined the radio man as he eagerly headed for the nearby landing field.

"It's a crazy idea, having the radio beacon inside the compound," he chattered as they walked. "The ship has to land near it. One slip, and we get two hundred tons of metal on our heads."

"The beacon had to be within the compound for protection," Ken explained, though he knew the radio man already knew the answer to his own complaint. "Without the beacon we'd be helpless. The ship couldn't land, and we'd be stranded."

"Not as bad as that," protested the radio operator. "The first ship didn't have a guiding beacon."

"We were lucky," recalled Ken. Just how lucky they had been was a minor miracle. They had avoided the turbulent seas covering two thirds of the planet. They had missed the mountains and swamps which covered almost all the rest. They had even missed the towering fern trees which could so easily have tilted them out of control three hundred feet from the ground. Instead they had landed on one of the few relatively flat stretches of solid ground, in one of the scattered clearings studding the thickness of the jungle.

He finished the short walk in silence. The field lay a few hundred yards from the compound, a wide expanse of cleared jungle. The ship rested to one side, half off the clearing. Men were busy beating out several small fires started by the splash of the jets. The radio operator looked critically at the ship.

"That's a new one. Look at the low flat construction. More like a deep pie dish than anything else. Better than the old dart shaped ones. More stability for landing; less liability to tilt. I'll bet that they can even give it lateral motion on the way down."

Ken, remembering how the ship had seemed to slip sideways just before landing, nodded.

"Wonder what they brought this time?" he murmured.

His only answer was a sharp crack from the contracting metal of the jets.

The pilot stretched short legs, cocked his head slightly at the outstretched glass, and downed the contents in a single swallow.

"Good stuff," he remarked, suggestively extending the empty container.

"We make it from one of the local fruits," explained Wilson. "It's rather a nice drink."

The pilot nodded, relaxing in the big chair. Around him clustered the technicians, the top grade officers, and as many of the junior staff as could squeeze inside the recreation hut. The ship had been unloaded, mail distributed. Most of the garrison were busy writing letters home, eager to catch departure time early next morning.

"Made a quick trip this time, didn't you?" asked the radio operator.

"Fair," agreed the pilot. "We stopped blasting at ten miles a second, cut almost two weeks off the trip." He sipped at his drink. "Things are beginning to speed up a little. Three new ships almost ready—improved design, more cargo space and payload." He grinned. "Two more years and you can expect an invasion."

Ken grunted dubiously. "Anticipating things, aren't they?"

"I don't think so," protested the pilot. "After all you've been here three years and nothing much has happened. Venus seems to be harmless. Why wait longer?"

"It's a new planet," reminded Wilson. "We can hardly be expected to learn all about it in three short years."

"No need to. If there were dangerous diseases, animal life, natives, that would be different, but there aren't. What's to stop people moving in?"

Harrison cleared his throat. "Within another two years Venus will be ready for them," he promised.

Ken flashed him a sharp look. "What's new from Mars?" he asked to change the subject. The pilot shrugged.

"Not too good. I'm glad I'm off that run. You should see them. No comfort, no decent food, no hope." He stared at his glass. "I suppose that's the trouble really. No hope. Ten years, and still they haven't managed to grow a single blade of grass. Everything they use has to be imported. The whole project seems to be a dead loss." He grinned around the room. "You don't know when you're well off."

"I don't know," demurred Ken. "We have our own problems."

"Maybe," said the pilot. Ken could see that he didn't believe him. "I'll be having problems too if I don't get back to the ship. With but a two man crew half of it mustn't slack." He struggled

reluctantly to his feet. "Blast off's at eight tomorrow. Get all mail and dispatches aboard by six."

A bottle beneath each arm he steered his passage towards the door. Many of the junior officers accompanied him on the short walk towards the landing field. Ken looked at Wilson.

"Think we can do it?"

"Solve all our problems within two years?" Wilson shrugged. "I doubt if it will make a bit of difference. We've lived here, that will be good enough for anyone. When the tales of virgin forests, untapped minerals, exotic fruits and rapid growing truck gardens are released, watch out for the deluge."

"Then what?" asked Ken bitterly. "Shanty towns. Open-cut mining. Ravished forests. The works." He sighed.

"You don't like civilization, do you?" Wilson said.

"Let's just say that I don't like the things civilization brings with it," suggested Ken. "To me this is a new world, I'd hate to see it turned into a carbon copy of the old."

"Maybe the natives will have something to say about it?" Wilson sounded forlornly hopeful.

"Maybe they will," agreed Ken. "And maybe they'll get the same answer that others got. Remember Cortez? Remember the "Black Ivory" of the Gold Coast. Remember the Red Indians?" He slowly rose to his feet. "I feel depressed tonight," he apologized. "But I'm worried. I keep thinking of two hundred men. Two hundred men armed with Vennors. It would take just one itchy trigger finger to start something almost impossible to stop."

"I don't get you?" Wilson frowned.

"Tell me," Ken said quietly, "just how long would it take two hundred men, shooting at everything in sight, to depopulate Venus?"

"A long time, I'd say," Wilson answered uneasily. "A few years at least."

"Could we say two years?" Ken nodded at Wilson's startled face. "Goodnight."

He walked slowly into the insect-droning night.

* * * * *

The men stood assembled in the first light of dawn. Even though the sun had not yet really warmed the air, the heat was stifling. Shirts stuck to backs, webbing cut into sweat softened skin. Heat

irritation made legs and arms twitch with a thousand prickles. An orderly officer called the role.

"Sergeant Fox."

"Here."

"Sergeant Brown."

"Here."

"Sergeant Foster."

No answer.

"Sergeant Foster?" The officer looked up irritably. "Has anyone seen Sergeant Foster?"

A corporal stepped forward.

"Yes? What is it?"

"Sergeant Foster left his hut last night, sir."

"Was he sick?"

"No, sir."

"I see." The officer bit his lip. "Sergeant Brown. Finish calling the role. Corporal. Come with me."

Together they strode toward the orderly room.

Harrison listened to the news in grim silence. With an abrupt gesture he dismissed the lieutenant, fastened the trembling corporal with an evil stare.

"Why didn't you report this earlier?"

"I thought . . ." began the corporal. "I mean . . ." he stammered.

"Never mind what you thought," roared Harrison. "You are not here to think. Now. What do you know?"

The door slammed open. Ken entered the room.

"What do you want?" snarled Harrison.

"I've just heard the news," Ken replied calmly. "I think that maybe I can help you."

"I don't need your help," Harrison snapped. "This is purely a military matter. I must ask you not to interfere."

Ken glanced significantly at the corporal. "Perhaps we had better discuss this afterwards. In the meantime, let me remind you that I am nominally in full charge of this expedition. Shall we continue?"

Harrison grunted, the veins swelling in his thick neck. With an effort he mastered himself, and turned back to the corporal.

"You state that Foster left his hut last night. How do you know?"

"I couldn't sleep very well, sir. I awoke several times. I thought that perhaps a smoke would help. I didn't have any cigarettes, so

went across to sergeant Foster's bed, to borrow one. It was empty."

"What time was this?"

"I don't know, sir. I haven't a watch."

"Naturally," grunted Harrison. "I am aware that owing to weight restrictions there are few watches among us. Did you notice anything that would give you an idea of the time? The guard being changed? Something like that?"

"No, sir."

"Is that all you can tell us?"

The corporal hesitated. "Yes, sir."

"Very well. Dismissed."

"One moment." Ken stepped forward. "Has the sergeant ever been absent from his bed before?"

"Once, at least, that I know of, sir."

Harrison grunted. "Nothing to that. Maybe he went to the latrines."

"No, sir," protested the corporal. "I thought that too, but he hadn't."

"When was this?" asked Ken curiously.

"The same evening of the day Lassiter was flogged, sir."

"I see. Have you anything else to say that might explain Foster's absence?"

"I don't think so, sir, except that something funny has been happening when we were on patrol."

Ken nodded. "I see. What was it?"

"The sergeant made it his habit to take the rear. He would fall behind the main body, a long way behind. On two occasions we had to return for him."

"And when were these occasions?"

"The first one, sir, was directly after Lassiter was flogged. The second time was yesterday."

"Did you see anything, or anyone?" Ken asked intently.

"No, sir."

"Very well. You may go."

The corporal saluted, spun on his heel, marched towards the door.

"One moment," called Ken softly. "You don't like sergeant Foster, do you?"

The corporal hesitated, one hand on the door latch.

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"No reason, sir."

"That is all."

Ken looked grimly at the closing door.

Harrison slammed a hard fist against the top of the desk before him. "Another one," he snapped harshly. "Another damned stinking deserter." He jerked to his feet.

"Where are you going?"

"Where? To call out the garrison of course. I'll comb the jungle for them. I'll search every tree and clump of growth, but I'll find them." Something feral shone briefly in the depths of his narrowed eyes. "I'll teach them to desert."

"Wait," snapped Ken urgently. "Listen to me for a moment." He grabbed Harrison's arm, and almost threw him back into his chair. "Let's be logical about this."

"Logical? Go to hell." Harrison strained against the restraining hand. "I'm going to get those deserters if it's the last thing I do."

"And leave the compound undefended?" asked Ken quietly.

Harrison shot him a startled look. "You think that's what's behind all this?" he mused for a moment. "Possible of course, damned possible. Sound military strategy. You think that's what they want?"

"Isn't it logical?" evaded Ken. "Now listen. Foster couldn't have stowed away on the ship; he was here after it had left. He must have gone into the jungle. All I'm interested in, is why? Why should he desert? I can understand Lassiter going, it was the only thing he could do; psychologically, it was inevitable. But why Foster?"

"Same reason," snapped Harrison. "Had been associating with one of the animals, and was afraid of discovery. That corporal probably had him worried; he knew what to expect, so he left before he got it."

"I don't think so," Ken said slowly. "It was obvious that the corporal hated Foster; I doubt if even he could give a good reason for his dislike, it's just one of those things to be expected when too many men are gathered together too long. It isn't natural for soldiers to carry tales to their officers about each other." He frowned at the door. "I expect trouble from that corporal soon."

"Why?"

"Guilt complex. He has broken an unwritten law. If the others don't take it out of him, he'll take it out of himself."

Harrison grunted impatiently. "Forget your nonsense now; this is important. What do you propose to do?"

"Nothing. We have no evidence that the natives intend us harm. Those men left under their own volition; the natives cannot be blamed. They will return the same way." He stared thoughtfully at the floor. "I hope that they don't return. Neither of them."

"What! Why?"

"Their example has already unsettled the men. If they come back with glowing reports, it will be hard to hold them. Suppose Foster returns. You whip him, imprison him, but you can't stop him talking. What would happen if he describes a paradise? A village of beautiful complacent women, good plentiful food, friendly men? Whom do you think the men would believe? You, with your insistence that the natives are animals, or Foster, who tells them what they want to hear?"

"So we do nothing," sneered Harrison. "The perfect solution." He glared at Ken with undisguised contempt.

"I think it only fair to warn you," Ken continued quietly, "that in my report to Headquarters, I have recommended that you be recalled."

"What?"

"On grounds of mental instability. I am sorry to tell you this, Harrison, but you are displaying all the symptoms of mental ill health."

"You're mad!"

"No. You are. I've watched you closely during the past three years, and you are not the man you once were. You are developing megalomania. I cannot tolerate a man in your position with such a malady."

"I see," Harrison snapped. To Ken's surprise he showed no anger. "Call a man mad, and the more he denies it, the more he is displaying symptoms. All I can say is that you are wasting your time. Headquarters, thank God, have a few men left—not whining weaklings blaming their own lack of manhood on the nonsense you peddle. So I am a madman, am I? Mad or not, I can cure the ailments plaguing this planet. Within two years the settlers are coming; I shall have this planet ready for them. Do you know what cargo the ship brought? Not men, I don't need anymore men. Not guns, I have enough. Ammunition. That's what they sent me.

Bullets. Bullets for the Vennors. Bullets to make elbow room for the men of Earth. Bullets to win a world!"

His voice dropped to almost a crooning sound. Little flecks of spittle hung at the corners of his lips. His eyes had a glazed look.

Ken stared at him with horror.

* * * * *

The man walked across the compound. He was wearing full battle equipment. Suddenly he flung himself to the ground, twisting his body as he fell. Before he hit the soft loam the slim barreled Vennor had spat sharply. He rolled once, squeezed off three more shots. Harrison nodded with satisfaction.

"Quick reaction. What's the score?"

An aid squinted at the wig-wagging flag showing above the hastily erected bank of dirt at the end of the stockaded area.

"Four shots, sir. Three hits, one near miss."

"Good enough," grunted the commander. "Continue with practice. Four rounds a man."

Ken watched the slowly moving file of soldiers, a sick dismay gnawing at the pit of his stomach. The humid air seemed tainted with the burnt fumes of explosives. The crack of the Vennors echoed from the high stockade, whispered from towering fern trees, undulated from the depths of the silent jungle.

It was the old story, Ken thought. Perhaps it had started with a man named Halberd. Certainly with one named Ferrara. But perhaps the honors should really go to Colt. Colt, Winchester, Browning. Martini. Maxim. Gatling. Lewis. Luger. Mauser. Bren. Bofors. Spandau, the names seethed through his mind. All with the same claim to fame—they had invented a better means of killing than their predecessors.

Now it was Vennor, the man who had proved that large calibre wasn't essential if you had high velocity. The guns that bore his name spat a five millimeter slug, either singly or in a stream. They had a terrific velocity—choked barrels and improved charges had seen to that. The tiny slugs hit with an impact sufficient to kill by shock alone. A man receiving a direct hit on any part of the body, died.

So great was the speed of the slugs, that if they struck an unyielding surface, they flashed into incandescent gas. With a Vennor it

was possible to fell a tree, blow a hole through any barrier other than thick steel, spray a stream of invisible destruction impossible to resist. But, they needed ammunition, lots of ammunition. The supply rocket had provided it.

Ken turned away, bumped into Wilson. The biologist looked worried; he jerked his head at the file of soldiers.

"The noise woke me up. What's happening?"

"Harrison's playing with his toys," Ken said bitterly.

"Why?" Wilson frowned at the flare of exploding bullets. "Does he expect trouble?"

"He always expects trouble. When he doesn't get it, he makes it." He stood for a moment deep in thought. "Call the rest of the technicians, will you, Wilson? Assemble them in the recreation hut. I want to call a general council."

Wilson looked at him, let his eyes stray to the soldiers, nodded. Ken watched him stride towards the laboratories, his gait remarkably like that of an elderly duck; he didn't smile—he was past smiling.

They sat around the empty hut, all twelve of them. Ken stood in the center of the little group, his eyes scanning them one by one. Wilson, the biologist. Fenshaw, the geologist. Cardon, the entomologist. Bense, the chemist. They sat with the other eight in a rough circle, and all of them looked serious.

"I've called you here because I believe that the emergency warrants it. I'm sorry to have taken you from your studies; I know that some of you have delicate experiments needing constant attention, yet still I feel that this is more important." Ken paused. He felt a little cynical, but with such men it was necessary to lead rather than drive. He was nominally in full charge of them all, but he could only hold their allegiance while he held their respect, and ignoring their experiments was no way to be popular.

"We know that, Ken," Wilson said. He looked around the little group. "I think that we are all agreed that there is an emergency?"

Heads nodded. Some gravely, some impatiently, they all signified their agreement.

"Harrison has decided to take things into his own hands. As you all know, we have adopted a policy of slow but safe investigation. We have classified, examined, and in general, let well alone. Now we are faced with a crisis."

"Are we?" Fenshaw looked startled. "What is it?"

"For reasons best known to himself, Harrison has decided on a policy of ruthless extermination of all native life." Ken jerked his head towards the compound. "The men are in training now."

"What?" Cardon leaped angrily to his feet. "I won't allow it. Who authorized such a decision?"

"No one." Ken lifted a calming hand. "I think that I should tell you that I have recommended Harrison's recall; however, it is not so easy."

"You must stop him," Cardon snapped tersely. "If he does that, who knows what may be irrevocably destroyed."

"I have tried to stop him," Ken said quietly. "I have reasoned with him, urged him, but it does no good."

"Why not?"

"Because Harrison is insane."

The door of the hut burst open.

Harrison stood just within the portal, thumbs hooked in the wide leather belt he affected, and stared at the assembled technicians with undisguised contempt.

"I heard you," he snapped at Ken. "Calling me mad again, aren't you? Well, I'll show you how mad I am."

He stood, wide legged, his narrowed eyes ranging over the ring of tense white faces. "From now on you are all under military jurisdiction; that means that you do as I say, when I say it."

"Not so fast," Ken barked. "You can't do that, and you know it." He turned to the technicians. "You are witnesses to this. At the Court Martial, for there will be a Court Martial, remember this. Harrison was sent here to protect us. He was placed beneath my orders. His troops were to be used only as and when I ordered. What he is doing is mutiny." He glared at the choleric face of the Major. "Harrison, you are relieved of your command."

"As you wish, sir," sneered Harrison. He half opened the door behind him. Beyond the panel soldiers stood ranked, the sun glinting from the barrels of their Vennors. He shut the door again.

"Would you care to try and take my command?"

Ken sighed. He had known it was futile, but he was still human enough to feel anger, even though he despised himself for it.

"What will you say when your relief arrives?"

Harrison shrugged. "If it arrives," he corrected. "In any case I cannot be recalled for at least six months. If I know the working

of Headquarters, it will be nearer a year; by that time much can happen."

"Such as?"

"Venus will be ready for the settlers," Harrison smiled thinly. "You have yet to learn, Drayton, that men do not cry over spilt milk. What cannot be undone, must be condoned. I shall not be penalized. I shall be commended. I shall give to Earth a new world, free of all potentially dangerous life. The ends, my dear Drayton, justify the means."

"Men will revile you," protested Wilson in a shocked voice. "Future generations will spit on your name."

"Maybe," agreed Harrison calmly. "That is always the fate of the pioneer. But *men* will not spit on my name. Weaklings, perhaps. Sniveling cowards, weak excuses of men who dwell with their minds in the past. They may revile me, but only because it is their habit to sneer at their betters. Men, real men, will understand."

The air felt very close; Ken could feel the rivulets of sweat trickling down his back. There was a tension in the air, an electric feeling, not wholly caused by human emotions. He tried to speak calmly, telling himself that he was dealing with a sick man.

"I know how you feel," he said gently. "But is there any need of this haste? The natives have not harmed us. Why destroy that which is irreplaceable? There are men who have given their names to the world, made them into common nouns. Ampere was one, Volt, another. They are names to be proud of. There are others. Quisling, De Sadé, yes, even Vennor. Those names are only heard in connection with death and evil. Would you like future generations to speak of "Harrisoning" when they talk of the murder of a new race? Would that please you? Wouldn't it be far better for men to build a city here—a city called Harrisonville?"

He paused. The sweat running down his back caused him to twitch and prickle. Harrison stood deep in thought.

"Your motives are good, yet they are motives stemming from wrong thinking. I cannot blame you; you are a soldier. A man such as yourself takes the hard way, the direct way. It is the hard way you know. How often in the years to come will you awake, sweating, regretting what you have done? How can you be sure, really sure, that what you intend doing is right? Sure beyond all question of doubt?"

Ken let his voice sink a little.

"It is a terrible thing to have a feeling of guilt. To kill a man, that is bad. To kill a nation, that is worse. What is it then to wipe out an entire planet? Could you live with that guilt?"

Harrison licked his lips. Ken could see the wet shine of his eyes beneath the frowning brows, the sweat coursing down the lined cheeks. Almost he felt sorry for the man. He could imagine the strain of conflicting desires tearing at Harrison's sanity. He had been so confident, so sure. He had won emotional release by his decision, now again he felt doubt.

While he continued to feel it the Venusians were safe.

* * * * *

The day passed; the night dragged on its weary length; a new day dawned. The sun lifted over the horizon, a wide golden patch on the eternal clouds—angry clouds, twisting and writhing in the grip of some hidden turbulence. Layer upon layer of clouds, shredding, coiling, massing, but never wholly breaking, never showing the unshielded sun, or the momentary glory of clear sky.

Ken stepped from his sleeping quarters, sniffed at the air, squinted at the boiling sky, shrugged irritably.

"Feels as if a storm's due to break," he said to Wilson. The biologist grunted agreement.

"Quicker the better. It needs something to clear the air; my nerves are jumping all over."

Ken nodded. Emotions could be disturbed by climate as easily as by human relationships. A storm, by its psychological effect, would make his work much easier.

Men marched across the compound. Officers bawled orders their voices harsh with unnatural irritation. Men glowered, mouthed silent curses, dragged their way mechanically through the routine drills.

Harrison passed them, frowning as he strode to make personal inspection. As usual his uniform was impeccable, the insignia of rank gleaming from his collar. Guards peered down from the high stockade, watching with interest the movements of the men below.

Harrison strode impatiently down the line of assembled men. Irritably he snatched at the Vennors, peered down their barrels, ran a cold eye over equipment, moved on. Standing well away from the garrison, he watched his men move through the daily drill, his lips thinning angrily as they went through their maneuvers,

Heat, enervation, the tension of the threatening storm, all helped to make the men self conscious, aware of his critical gaze.

They moved sluggishly, were slow to respond to the shouted orders. Tempers grew frayed, sweating officers, aware of the coldly critical eye, fumbled their commands, hesitated, fumbled their weapons.

"Halt!" Harrison roared the terse command. He strode impatiently forward, hands clasped behind his back, head thrust out.

"Call yourself soldiers?" the sarcasm sounded heavily in his voice. "I've seen better in a rookie camp. The cream of all Earth. The gallant defenders of Earth's bridgehead on a new world. Scum!"

Junior officers flushed angrily beneath his contempt. Paradoxically the men tried to hide covert grins. They had created a diversion; they were satisfied.

Harrison stared coldly at them. "Grin you cowardly dogs. Hide your smirks. Haven't you guts enough to laugh in my face?"

"Well, smile while you can, it won't be for long! He jerked his head at a lieutenant. "Full marching order. Thirty mile route march. Non stop. Move!"

"But, sir," the officer protested. "There is a storm threatening."

"What of it?"

"The ground mist, sir. How are we going to find our way back in case of need?"

Wilson plucked Ken's arm. "He's right you know. Compasses are useless here; I bet Harrison's forgotten that."

Harrison grinned ferally at the young officer. "I said a thirty mile route march, didn't I, lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did I say in what direction?" he snarled in sudden anger. "March them around the compound for all I care, but march them until they drop. Move!"

"Yes, sir," the officer flushed, saluted, moved away.

Thunder murmured in the far distance. A few drops of rain slapped against the soft loam, warning of the deluge to come. It grew dark, fitful flickers of lightning dancing on the far horizon. Ken breathed deeply, lifting his face to feel the first drops of warm rain.

"Here it comes," he murmured gratefully.

Something round and black and small hurled through the air.

It rose high above the stockade, swept in a graceful arc, bounced on the ground, rolled almost to his feet.

It had black hair, a white face, a bloody stump of neck. It grimaced, the white teeth gleaming against the black soil.

Wilson retched. Ken stared in sheer horror.

Lassiter grinned—his severed head lying at their feet.

The storm broke.

Rain, blinding deafening rain, fell from the lowering clouds, drenching the sodden ground, filling the already humid air with mist. It was difficult to breathe. It was almost impossible to see. The senses grew numb beneath the steady impact of tons of water. The trees dripped water. The clouds poured water. The ground oozed it. It was everywhere.

Miserably Ken huddled in the folds of his waterproof. Desperately he tried to keep the squat figure of Harrison within the limited range of his vision.

Before him, behind him, all around him, moved the men of the garrison. Armed. Equipped for battle. Loaded with food for their bodies. Loaded more heavily with food for their Vennors. Men with itchy trigger fingers. Men, bored to the verge of insanity, glad of any excuse for violent action. Men who didn't have to worry about the guilt neurosis of their actions.

Men bent on extermination.

He couldn't really blame them, Ken thought dully. Even now the thought of the severed head brought its inevitable reaction. Harrison had acted immediately. The precarious balance of his conflicting emotions had received the impetus he secretly desired. A man had died. An Earthman. Someone had to pay.

Ken fought his way to the head of the column, plucked at the Major's sleeve.

"Can't we at least wait until the rain stops?" he yelled.

Harrison shrugged off his hand. "No. It's our only chance to catch those who threw the head. They won't be expecting us." He sounded happy. Confident that what he was doing was the right thing. Earthmen had to be protected. If they were ever going to win a place on alien worlds, that lesson had to be taught. Taught so that it would never be forgotten.

The rain eased a little. Ken glanced upwards. They had entered a great thicket of trees, the broad leaves breaking the force of the

downpour. He mentioned something which had been worrying him.

"How do we find our way back?"

Harrison gestured towards a man burdened with a metallic box, the thin whip of a radio antenna lashing the air above his shoulder.

"Directional beam. We can guide ourselves by the radio beacon back in the compound."

"I see. What are you going to do now?"

"Fan out. We'll swing in a wide circuit about the area, shoot everything that moves. When we have sterilized the immediate vicinity, I'll send out patrols, quarter as far as we can reach. By the time we can get helicopters from home, I'll have the entire area clear."

From just ahead the sharp crack of a Vennor split the air. Something fell to the soggy ground. A man yelled in triumph.

"What was it?" snapped Harrison.

"Not sure, sir. Here."

The soldier came within vision dragging a bulky something behind him. Ken stared down at a scaly, long necked creature. Fragments of vegetation still showed between the toothless jaws. He made a gesture of distaste.

"A herbivore. Do you have to kill them too?"

"My orders were to shoot everything that moves," Harrison said stubbornly. "If it's dead it can't hurt us." He kicked at the beast with his boot. "Carry on," he ordered the soldier.

Time passed. The spiteful cracks from the Vennors grew, reached a climax, died away to an occasional odd shot. Ken stood at the mounting heap of slaughtered animals. Herbivores, all of them. Some were huge, like the extinct Sloth; some were small, scaled, lizard-like—all were harmless.

He felt sick.

Harrison grew more and more annoyed. He stared at the heap of dead, pulling at his lower lip, glowering into the depths of the forest. Ken knew what troubled him. Harrison was not a naturally cruel man. His orders had been to kill—but he wanted dead natives, not this pitiful heap of useless animal life.

"Not a very pleasant sight, is it, Harrison?" Ken asked quietly. "Look at it. Useless for food. Useless to help you justify yourself. They aren't even harmful, let alone potentially dangerous. Is this the point of your crusade to make a new world safe for man to live on?"

Harrison flinched beneath the sarcasm. "They are unfortunate victims," he grudgingly admitted. "But what can I do? I cannot order my men to discriminate; we don't know enough about the wild life to determine what is harmless and what is not. My orders must stand. Destroy them all."

Snatching a Vennor from his aid, he strode into the dark forest, Ken close on his heels. Harrison glared at him, but made no move to prevent his coming.

Something moved at the edge of vision. Ken squinted, trying to focus the elusive shape. Beside him Harrison grunted with sudden triumph, swung the Vennor to his shoulder.

The shape moved closer, swaying from side to side. Ken heard the hiss of expelled breath, the subconscious tensing of the man at his side. Desperately he grabbed at the slender barrel of the weapon. It spat, the slug tearing from the muzzle, exploding with a vicious crack against the bole of a giant tree. Ken ignored the pain in his hand. Ignored the savage curse Harrison flung at him. He pointed dumbly down the clearing before them.

Swaying, reeling, both hands above his head, tears streaming down his cheeks, a man staggered towards them.

An Earthman.

He hadn't been ill treated. His flesh was firm, his skin clear, even his uniform shirt and shorts showed only the signs of his hasty passage, but he seemed somehow different.

The immaculate soldier, the professional soldier, the man who took a pride in his iron emotions, his stoicism, had gone. Instead he had developed into something which Ken for one, was glad to see.

They sat on the wet ground beneath one of the shielding trees, the rain sending a dull murmur down through the broad leaves. Harrison, his eyes blazing with questions, Ken, watching, studying the flow of emotion across the haggard features, and sergeant Bob Foster, deserter extraordinary.

"Stop it," he pleaded. "For God's sake, stop it."

"Stop what?" snapped Harrison.

"The killing. The stupid senseless killing." Foster writhed in the grip of two men. "Stop it. Stop it, before it's too late!"

Harrison looked down at the man, his face iron hard. "They killed your companion," he reminded. "Killed Lassiter. Flung his head over the stockade. Do you know what you are asking?"

"Lassiter?" Foster grinned mirthlessly. "They didn't kill Lassiter. I watched him die. They didn't kill him. You did!"

"Tell me about it," Ken said quietly. "What happened after you left camp?"

Foster sighed, relaxing in the grip of his guards.

"I met a woman just after Lassiter had been flogged. I asked him about it, but he wouldn't tell me anything. Then I heard that he had gone, and I hated him for it." He bit his lower lip. "I was jealous I suppose, but I needn't have been. I saw her again, several days after Lassiter had gone. She seemed to want me to do something. The rest you know."

"We know that you left the compound," Ken said. "What did you do then?"

"Where is their village?" Harrison snarled. "When you deserted, where did they take you? Can you lead us to their village?"

"Shut up!" Ken snapped. "Leave this to me." He turned to Foster. "What happened after you left camp?"

"I couldn't sleep that night," Foster continued dully. "I felt restless; I hardly remembered getting up, getting dressed, leaving the compound. She was waiting for me. I touched her hand, the first time I had touched her—and then we were at their village."

"How do you mean?" questioned Ken. "Did you walk far? What is the village like?"

Foster shook his head. "I don't remember. All I know is that we were suddenly at a village. There were small conical huts scattered about the edge of a clearing. The woman led me to one, thrust me inside. Lassiter was there."

"Did they keep you prisoner?" Harrison snapped.

"No. Nothing like that. I thought that was it, at first, but I could leave the hut when I wished, go where I wished. I wasn't held in any way. They put food before the hut, great bowls of soft fruits, a root of some kind, gourds of water and something like a light wine. We fed well."

"Why didn't you return? What kept you there?"

"Lassiter. He was dying, and besides, I didn't want to leave."

"If Lassiter were dying, why didn't you return for help?" Ken eyed him shrewdly.

"I didn't think of it. I wanted to stay."

"Are you sure that Lassiter was dying?" Harrison asked bluntly.

Foster grimaced as if it hurt. "I saw his back. I saw the festering

sores, the inflamed wounds. I heard his moaning. I tried to help him, but what could I do? I couldn't strip off the plastic dressing; he screamed whenever I touched him. I tried to wash it off, but you need a solvent for that stuff. I just had to sit and watch him die. Sit and hear him cursing you between his screams." He looked down at his clenched hands.

"I was glad when he died."

"Why?" Ken asked gently.

"They had liked him, but they didn't care for me. They would come into the hut and look at him. Sometimes they would touch him gently; he seemed easier then, as if his pain had left him. I would sit in a corner and watch, and I envied him."

"What happened when he died?"

"They took him away. He began to smell a little, the heat and the rotting of his body—he was pretty far gone when he died—made it impossible to keep him there. I don't know what they did with him."

"And then?"

"I stayed. I hung around hoping that they would like me. They pulled down the hut; they stopped giving me food; they ignored me. It hurt."

He stared down at the wet soil. "They knew what you were doing. The woman came to me, touched my hand—and I heard the sound of the Vennors. I ran. I found you, and here I am." He looked at them, tears running down his cheeks.

"They sent me back, do you understand? They sent me back. Back to the *beasts!*"

Unashamedly he wept.

* * * * *

Harrison plodded grimly through the still streaming forest, Ken determinedly sticking at his side. The rain had eased, but still the trickling water from the great leaves cast a thin mist around them. Little sounds came from the rest of the garrison, but there was no more shooting.

"Have you analyzed Foster's story?" Ken asked.

Harrison grunted. "No. It's perfectly simple. When you have had the experience with deserters that I have, you will be able to see things in the proper perspective."

"And what is the proper perspective?" Ken asked drily.

"He ran away. He returned. He fears punishment. To avoid it, he invents a story. I've seen it happen a dozen times before."

"But why should he return?"

"He's an Earthman. Desperate for a woman as he was, he still retained some elements of decency. Lassiter's death must have shocked him into sanity. He probably remembered his wife, compared her to the animals he was associating with, and decided to return."

"He told the truth about one thing at least," Ken insisted. "Lassiter was dead when his head was removed. I tried to tell you that before. Coagulation of the blood in the main arteries proved that."

"It makes no difference." Harrison sounded stubborn. "They desecrated an Earthmen. They must pay."

"It seems a hard penalty," Ken protested. "Must you kill them without some attempt to understand their viewpoint?"

Harrison snorted impatiently. "Listen. I rescinded my orders to shoot everything on sight, only because the sound of the Vennors had obviously warned the natives. We must be somewhere near their camp. Foster proves that. I intend to surround the clearing—and wipe them out." He lifted one hand. "Save your breath, Drayton, and don't talk. If you think that you can warn them of our approach, you are mistaken. I give you fair warning; if you disobey my orders, you will suffer an accident in the fighting." He grinned savagely. "It would be very easy for someone to mistake you for a native, wouldn't it?"

Ken swallowed. He knew that Harrison meant every word of his threat. The man had thrown caution to the winds; he was hell bent on one object, and right or wrong he would carry it out. Extermination of the natives!

And there was nothing he could do to stop it. He had tried; he had persuaded; he had threatened. For awhile he had dared to hope, but all his science, all his skill, was impotent before the primordial blood lust of the average man. If it threatens you—kill it!

A simple creed. It had carried men on a tide of blood from a fear crazed animal crouching in a cave, to the very conquest of space. He had mastered his own world by that creed. He would master others, but it was the wrong way.

It had to be wrong. Intelligent races had to learn to live with

their neighbors—not destroy them. The cost was too great; the payment too severe. Nations, races, equally with individuals, could suffer from remorse. Guilt neurosis could be a terrible thing. It could drive men insane. It could drive an entire race the same way.

Something moved in the mist, just beyond clear vision. Harrison threw up a warning hand, gestured, men melted silently into the forest, the barrels of their weapons steady before them.

Ken felt a moment of panic. For one instant he thought of shrieking a warning. Harrison glared at him, the Vennor in his hands lifting in silent menace. His eyes were bloodshot, his features drawn and tense. He was no longer human.

Tension-taut nerves were near the breaking point. Tongues flickered across lips suddenly dry. Hearts hammered, fingers tightened on smooth metal triggers. Sights aligned on shadowy shapes moving steadily through the mist.

Harrison sighed, his breath hissing from between thin lips. The Vennor lifted to his shoulder, steadied, the finger commencing the lethal squeeze.

Ken choked, half lifted one hand, tried desperately to shout a warning. Something gripped his tongue. Something gripped his limbs, his muscles. Darkness rushed towards him. Through the dimming of his vision he could see the Vennor falling from Harrison's grasp. It fell on the soft loam, and Harrison collapsed beside the gleaming weapon.

Then blackness roared over him.

The rain had stopped. The sky showed the same clear mass of snowy clouds that he remembered—the sun, a great patch of golden light high above the horizon. A lizard stared at him with eyes that twinkled like little jewels, then ran swiftly up the bole of a giant tree.

A faint wind blew, stirring the great leaves, whispering softly through the tangled jumble of vines and overblown flowers. Insects hovered, droning with the beat of their shimmering wings; the heat of a new day pressed warmly around him.

He stretched, feeling the thick soft loam of the forest floor yield a little to the thrust of his muscles. He felt relaxed. At ease, physically and mentally. He turned his head.

Harrison smiled at him, his hands locked behind his head, legs stretched full length on the soft ground before him.

"Hello, I've been waiting for you to wake up."

Ken rolled over onto one side. "How long have we slept?"

Harrison shrugged, glancing at his wrist. "No idea. Watch has stopped. Not that it matters." He climbed lithely to his feet. "Coming?"

Ken nodded, rose reluctantly, fell into step beside Harrison. His foot struck against something hard. It was the Vennor, a trace of rust marring the smooth shine of the metal. Absently he picked it up.

"What are you going to do about Foster?" he said conversationally as they strode through the silent trees.

"Foster? Why nothing!" Harrison smiled ruefully. "Poor devil, he's already had his punishment. Think of it, to be so near, then to be rejected." He turned to the psychologist. "We must help him, Ken."

"Of course," Ken nodded. He took a deep breath of the humid air, savoring the delicate odors stemming from a host of growing things. "You know what's happened to us, I suppose?"

Harrison nodded.

"We were so blind," murmured Ken. "So foolishly blind. It was plain before us, yet we would not see."

"I was the one to blame," Harrison sounded almost ashamed.

"No. You are not to blame. If blame there must be, then blame your ancestors, your predecessors, the men that dwelt in caves and struck before trying to understand. We grew up with that heritage. We had to leave our world to find another."

"Talk to me," begged Harrison humbly. "You know about these things; tell me more."

Ken smiled. "Is it necessary? You know as much as I. But let us talk; it will make our journey shorter." He swung the Vennor idly in his hand. "How long would it take for a human to lose his pigmentation in a climate such as this? Ten thousand years? Twenty? Or perhaps it was the reverse, maybe it was we who gained pigmentation. Will we ever know?"

He mused a little.

"They must have looked upon Lassiter as we would a small helpless animal. He was sick; they fetched another of his own kind to tend him. He died. What could they do? He had to be buried; the climate makes that essential." He laughed a little. "It was really good of them to let his friends know that he had died. They choose

the most logical way, but then they are always logical. It was just that we didn't understand."

"And I wanted to kill them," murmured Harrison. "I wanted to kill everything that moved."

"They couldn't allow that, of course. When they realized what we were doing, they had to act. They sent Foster to us. He must have been a nuisance anyway, hanging around their village like a stray dog wanting someone to adopt him. They tried to dissuade him, but they couldn't turn him out."

"I wouldn't listen to him," said Harrison wonderingly. "Now it seems so strange."

"Foster failed," agreed Ken. "It wasn't really his fault—we were all insane."

"But now we're sane," breathed Harrison.

"Yes. It took very little. A slight mental adjustment—a little mental therapy—merely altering our point of view. A little thing, from their standards, but a great thing from ours."

They walked in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. The forest was no longer alien. The wild life no longer threatening. Ken felt a great awe. Would they ever be allowed to mingle with the Venusians on equal terms? Would they ever be able to reach the heights of mental adjustment that made weapons, cities, mechanical servants unnecessary?

He hoped so. Deep within him he knew that it would be so. Something tapped against his leg; he looked down. The rust-stained Vennor still swung from his hand. He looked at it distastefully. The open confession of man's weakness and fear, it was the end product of a long trail of hate and savage blindness. He flung it aside.

Before them the forest thinned, the faint trail of a well trodden path opening before them. The landing field came into sight, men busy clearing the fresh sprung riot of rain-induced growth.

Above their heads a bird wheeled, scaly-necked, leather-winged. It soared on fitful thermal currents, watching the scene below with curiously bright eyes. It flapped rustling wings, circled, and was gone.

Harrison looked after it smiling.

Already men were at work tearing down the stockade.

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You are what you eat.

H I M

By A. E. VAN VOGT

As all knew, everything came from Him.

Josiah Him, dictator of Earth—except for a few areas of resistance, consisting of a total of about eight hundred million scientific savages, a portion of whom were located in the western half of North America and the rest in the great mountain regions of Asia and elsewhere.

These barbaric remnants had, in their madness, declared a state of war on Him. As it developed, the counter-attack from Him had included an initial surprise invasion—which was repelled. After the defeat, the word from Him was that every means of humanitarian warfare would be employed to defeat the savages, including—in severe emergencies—the planarian education plan.

This particular word from Him had come that morning to Edgar Maybank: "...Your assistants, hereinafter to be called students, have been selected for planarian accelerated education. ... Report July 12——"

That was next day!

...The man who had climbed onto the bar stool next to Edgar, and who had somehow drawn the anguished truth out of Edgar, was singularly unsympathetic. He was a big, gentle fellow, who jiggled a little to the music, but had all the correct attitudes instantly at the tip of his tongue.

"... The word from Him," he said with quiet certainty, "is that the planarian system should only be used in extreme emergencies. All truly patriotic educators should therefore be prepared for the supreme sacrifice. You are to be congratulated on this rare opportunity to serve Him but, uh, don't you think that's rather an unusual get-up for an expert?"

He thereupon eyed Edgar's corduroys and formless shirt.

Edgar said, "I came straight from work."

"Oh, straight from the laboratory."

"I guess you could call it that," said Edgar absently.

He was admitting to himself, gloomily, that he had been very remiss in the past, when other people had been selected for the planarian program. In fact, his indignation against the plan had started belatedly that morning. What bothered him most was the feeling that he was the victim of a scheme.

"After all," he said, "we know that these decisions are not made by Him, but by administrators and sub-administrators—"

The older man interjected quickly: "But always from the highest motives, solely in the name of Him, responsible to Him——"

No question, that was the theory; and Edgar had given lip service to it for so long that he was now briefly silenced.

While the dancers writhed around him, and his bar-mate kept time by moving one portion or another of his body, Edgar sipped his drink and grimly contemplated the entire planarian idea.

Long ago, it had been discovered that planarian worms could be trained in simple condition responses. When these trained worms were ground up and fed to other planarian worms these latter learned the same responses faster than worms not so fed.

During the great rebellion, at the command of Him, the truths thus scientifically established were applied to human beings. University professors, scientists, and other experts were ground up and fed to their students in an accelerated education program.

Edgar's lean face took on a bitter expression. "There's a certain sub-administrator who's been trying to make time with my girl," he said darkly, "and it's significant to me that it's this sub who has now selected me."

He added hastily, "Don't get me wrong. I'll be the first to admit that I've always been proud of my special ability to brew beer. It's a rare talent I have, attested to by the undoubted fact that my company are the official brewers for Him. As a result, I am the highest paid employee in the beer business. Still, there are other beers. So where's the emergency?"

He became aware that his companion had stopped his wiggling and was blinking at him. Something seemed to have sobered him.

"Beer!" said the man. He sipped from his glass, his heavy face oddly twisted. Then: "It's an unusual emergency, as you say. What did you say was the name of this sub-administrator?"

Edgar told him it was Ancil Moody.

The man took out his card and handed it to Edgar with a decisive thrust. It read:

STACY PANGBORN
Chief of Administration
PALGLOMHIM
Government Center

Edgar gulped and almost dropped the card. Everybody knew that PalGlomHim was—well, it was tops.

"You're a VIP?" asked Edgar.

"Extremely so," acknowledged the man, quietly. He added, "Write your name on the back of that card and do not—repeat, do not—report to the Segmentation Plant tomorrow."

Edgar was weaving a little from the way something inside his head was singing. "W-what do you think will happen?"

"Read the papers!" was the enigmatic reply.

Whereupon the VIP walked out, swaying in a dignified way.

Edgar was more than a little disturbed next day when there was no report in the papers that seemed relevant. He began to feel unpatriotic. His conscience began to tug him toward his duty.

But before he could decide, the secret police roared down on him. "... Your failure to report ... gross sedition ... special hearing."

At the hearing, held in a chamber deep in the bowels of the earth, Edgar was shown photographs. One was of the VIP.

"That's him," he said.

Great excitement among his interrogators. "... The enemy leader himself ... come down from the mountains ... in a bar."

It was decided that the people in the bar must have been involved. Therefore ... extermination program. But, first, anything to do with the opposition leader required a personal interview with Him.

And so there was Edgar in the Presence, surrounded by the private guards of the great man, and with one top official. All others were barred. Edgar lay face down on the glossy floor; a voice from above asked questions, and he answered from the corner of his mouth as best he could.

Presently the voice said, startled: "Beer?" It asked querulously, "My brand?"

"Apparently, your Super."

Silence, then: "Bring that sub-administrator!"

The secret service had already embraced Ancil Moody in steel

handcuffs, and he was brought in, pale, fleshy, anxious, and laid down on the floor at the feet of Him.

There was a pause; Edgar ventured a quick glance and saw that the eyes of Him were gazing at the cringing sub-administrator. Abruptly, the voice of Him came: "Is there any shortage of sub-administrators of his class?"

The voice of the chief of protocol could not seem to say fast enough that the shortage was unquestionably acute.

Again, silence; but presently the judgment of Him was delivered: "First, obtain a confession, then segmentation under the planarian plan."

They were about to subject the unfortunate Ancil Moody to a special type of humanitarian torture—instant, extreme pain—when he said hastily, "I'm willing to confess. But first remove my disguise——"

That caused a murmur of wonderment and some tension. The disguise—a flesh mask—came off in its gooey way, quickly. The chief of protocol, who had knelt beside the prisoner's body while it was being unmasked, said in astonishment:

"Your excellency, this creature's face bears a startling resemblance to you——"

Something of the truth of this situation must have penetrated to the dictator's aide at that instant. He surged to his feet from beside the bound man, and looked around him, eyes wide and wild. He yelled hoarsely, "Guards, your guns!"

Blasters glinted in response, in half a dozen hands. At that point, the head guard said, "All right—Dickenson—Gray!"

Two blasters flashed their purple flame, and the chief of protocol went down, skin blackened, clothes burning furiously.

A moment later—while Edgar, still not daring to move, watched from the top of his eyes—six blasters pointed at Him. The dictator had started to run, but now he stopped and slowly put up his hands.

The head guard walked over and removed the handcuffs from the sub-administrator. That young man climbed to his feet, and said in a voice of command, "That was good work. All right, disguise Him."

Rough hands grabbed the tense Him. Handcuffs clicked. A make-up box appeared, and an Ancil Moody mask was produced from it. In a few minutes, one of the guards had made up Him to resemble the sub-administrator as he had been when he was brought into the room. The dead aide was dragged into a closet.

The voice of the new Him said to the old Him, "We got our

men in to be your guards long ago, but of course they couldn't just kill you. That would simply have started a struggle for power among your military and political commanders, with no real change. So our problem was to figure out how we could maneuver the man who resembled you superficially—myself—into your presence, wary as you have always been. It took wild figuring—as you can see—including making sure that our bait—” He indicated Edgar, who was beginning to stir—“did not become suspicious—and, of course, taking it for granted that the planarian program was, on the one hand, a method of controlling the scientific community and, on the other, a way of getting rid of any important recalcitrant—”

He broke off, finished grimly, “Since the method has such enormous propaganda acceptance, I order that the original sentence on Ancil Moody be carried out.”

Actually, what happened when the sub-administrators gathered for their educational supplement, the segmentation machine accidentally—it was said—flushed the entire ground-up body of the dictator into a sewer.

The new power group did not really believe that planarianism worked on human beings. But—involved as its members were in a careful re-introduction of democratic procedures—no one among them wanted to take the chance that the peculiar abilities possessed by Him might be passed on to any group of bright young executives.

As a substitute, these latter were given an ample ration from the private beer stock of Him. They were served by the brewmaster himself—Edgar Maybank—whose charming new bride assisted him in waiting on tables.

A real festive occasion! everyone agreed afterwards.

* * * * *

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4372 Coolidge Ave., Los Angeles 66, Calif.

The Karn never defended themselves, yet their culture survived.

The Gentle People

By JAMES CAUSEY

ILLUSTRATED BY SUZANNE

The third day we caught the Karn.

At dawn it started forlornly down from the hilltop crag. All hope was gone. But it turned and toiled up the summit, furry head bowed in despair. Once the sunlight flashed on its pelt, turning it into a pulsating jeweled flame. Then it vanished.

"I'm glad it didn't give up," Garth gloated. "Makes for a better chase."

I said nothing. He shoved me contemptuously up the slope. "Move, damn you."

We kept climbing. Whenever I stumbled and fell, Garth kicked me erect. Even for a human, he was a hard master.

By noon we were in the forest. Only a few hundred yards ahead the Karn moved painfully through the trees. It was beyond exhaustion, yet it dared not stop.

"It knows," I said.

"That it can't possibly escape? Good. Any moment now, I look for a last stand."

"Karns never defend themselves."

His harsh chuckle. "Just wait."

This forest was preserve territory, and sacred ground. If a Conservation Ranger spotted us the death penalty was swift and certain. Yet violation of the Galactic Conservation Code only amused Garth. In a rare moment of confidence he had once told me that legal payment for all the laws he had broken would approximate nine hundred years in solitary, a half-billion credits in fines, and six executions. One does not become owner of a Tri-Solar Trading cartel without a certain ruthlessness.

Yet Garth's ruthlessness took strange forms. It was not simply



a matter of pitting his endurance against the Karn's. Perhaps he wished to break the Karn, as he had once broken me. Perhaps he had in mind to make that rainbow pelt into a cape and wear it to Earth in mocking defiance of conservation law. More likely, he wished to disprove the old legends.

I touched Garth's mind furtively. It was like entering a dark, icy cavern.

"I felt that," Garth snapped, and cuffed me across the muzzle.

I whimpered. Not from the pain, but from what I had seen in Garth's mind. We Tullians make excellent body-servants. We are slightly telepathic and can anticipate a master's wish. But Garth did not like to be probed while on the hunt.

I tried to think how it would be in three months when my indenture period expired and Garth made me rich. I tried to imagine my cousins looking on with envy while I was appointed tribal shaman as befitted one who hired out for Earthman service. But I could feel only a sick shame for having told Garth about the Karn. He could not understand how any culture not of power or raven could survive. And he hated what he could not understand.

Above us the giant conifers stirred in the breeze. In the green silence Garth gripped my arm.

"Ahead," he breathed. "In those ferns."

Across a bubbling stretch of marsh, the Karn watched us. Its dark liquid eyes were expressionless. About its neck hung the leather seed pouch, both paws cradling it protectively.

Garth studied the black ooze warily. "Quicksand. It went out of its way to lead us into a trap."

He hesitated, then jumped to a rotting log. It held. He tested the mud, then beckoned. "It's safe, Tull. Come on."

It was not safe. I sent out a questing tendril of thought, not at the Karn, for that would have been futile, but into the mind of the thing that waited beneath that quaking ooze.

"Come on!" Garth snapped, and gripped my shoulder. It was useless to resist him. The muck was knee-deep and cold. Garth jerked me along with a savage impatience. His vitality, even for a man, was amazing. Once he had stalked a Venusian plains bison for three days and nights without food or sleep and when at last he killed it he left the carcass to rot. Titans do not wear the scalps of pygmies.

We were very close to the Karn now. It stood on the bank, quite still. Garth frowned. "I don't understand——"

I felt him stiffen, heard his soft intake of breath.

We saw the Sorg.

It crouched on a drowned root within easy striking distance. Its red eyes glistened as it waited for Garth to move. Its scales gleamed jet and saffron.

Once bitten, Garth had perhaps twenty seconds to live. My people have a saying. "As swift as the sting of a Sorg."

But Garth was swifter. As the reptile leaped his fist was a white blur.

The Sorg squirmed broken-backed in the ooze.

Garth's voice was matter-of-fact as he pushed me to the fern bank. "Like I said, a trap."

We found the Karn's spoor near a clump of conifers.

"I can't understand," Garth mused, "why your race holds them sacred. Why they haven't long since been exterminated for their pelts."

I did not tell him how ten thousand generations ago my people had tried just that. I did not tell him what the Karn had done to us. Garth would not have believed. He believed in only one thing.

"Strength," he said. "The cornerstone of survival. If they're such advanced beings, why did the Conservation Council have to grant them sanctuary?"

"To protect man," I said.

"Ridiculous! Your race is dominant on this planet. You've got commerce, industry of sorts, even tribal wars. The Karns are animals. Primitive huts, a crude agriculture. They're even dependent on the frontier trading post for karba seed."

"That's not true. They could produce synthetic proteins easily, but their culture matrix forbids any foods they do not grow themselves. And the legends speak of the beauty of Karn villages."

"Would you say, Tull, that higher animals are capable of self-sacrifice?"

"Of course."

Garth smiled thoughtfully . . .

We were out of the forest now. The scrubby undergrowth gave way to purple lichen. Ahead, the Karn limped up the rocky slope. Exhaustion was a hot knife in my side as I stumbled, fell. Garth kicked me in the ribs.

"Up," he said. "You can speak their gibberish, Tull. I need you."

"Please," I gasped. "Bring the ship."

"When I'm ready."

A week ago the Karn had come to the frontier trading post to barter for Karba seed. Karba is the chief crop of the Karn. It feeds them through the nine-month winter. This year a capricious frost had killed their entire crop and there were scarcely two moons of planting time remaining. If the Karn did not deliver those seeds it meant starvation for his entire village.

The Karn moved very slowly now. Garth's breath whistled through his teeth as he climbed among loose shale. I slogged upwards in a gray fog of pain.

"He's almost done," said Garth softly, squinting up the slope. Then: "*Down!*"

He shoved me behind a granite overhang as the rattle grew into a roar. A cresting surf of sound that exploded in a foam of rocks and boulders smashing past the overhang. Through the stone torrent I heard another sound. Garth's laughter.

"So they never fight," he said in the sudden stillness.

"It was an accident. He dislodged a stone——"

My voice trailed off. I stared at a quartz outcropping near my foot. One edge of the quartz was a spear of yellow flame. I touched it reverently. "Look," I whispered, "a vein of pure sunstone."

Garth saw it and grinned. "Beautiful," he said. "Worth a thousand diamonds. Too bad you can't take it with you."

I stared at him, my nape fur bristling. He jerked me upright, shoved me ahead. "Hurry."

"Please," I begged.

"Nothing," he said ironically, "corrupts a good servant like wealth. Move!"

But there was no need to hurry. The Karn was waiting for us at the peak. It stood quivering from exhaustion as we approached, its eyes great and dark against the lambent fur. Yet it wore a quiet dignity that was almost condescending. It looked wisely at Garth, at me, and knew immediately who was master and slave.

If the Karn had not spoken, things might have been different. If it had fought, Garth would have killed it. If it had pleaded, Garth might have let it go, satisfied that Karn were only animals.

But it trilled sweetly at us and fool that I was, I translated.

"He surrenders," I said. "He offers you his pelt if you but let him take the seeds to his village."

"Tell him his pelt is already forfeit."

I did so. The Karn trilled uncertainly.

"What then, must he do in order to take the seeds to his village?"

It was the question Garth had been waiting for, and he looked at me for a long moment, savoring it. Then: "Promise not only his pelt but the pelts of his mate and his son."

I could feel my lips writhe back from my fangs. I leaped at Garth's throat and he felled me with one casual blow.

"Tell him!"

I whispered Garth's ultimatum. I could not look at the Karn. There was a long mournful silence. Finally the Karn spoke. "It promises to return in two days," I said. "With its mate and son."

Garth vented a metallic laugh. "I do not trust it. I will accompany it to the village."

"It does not trust you."

"No choice," Garth said.

He stood tall and strong, staring down at the blue foothills, his dark hair stirring in the breeze. Somewhere beyond those hills, three hundred Karn lived in peace and wisdom. But Garth could not believe that any culture with a meekness matrix could be great or wise. If necessary he would destroy that culture to prove his point.

I told the Karn and it cried. "All right," I said.

Garth nodded and touched a stud on his heavy belt. He seemed strangely disappointed. We waited for perhaps five minutes before the rocket came. It came down on a column of white-hot fire, to settle its tail fins delicately on the hilltop plateau. We entered the ship with the Karn.

"Why," I asked, "didn't we use the ship to capture him the first day?"

"It wouldn't have been sporting," Garth said.

We left the ship at the edge of the forest and walked single file for an hour, the Karn leading. Garth's hand hovered near his sonic pistol.

"Animals," he muttered. He would rather the Karn had attacked him, tooth and claw. "They're cunning. Watch for an ambush."

"He gave his word," I said.

The Karn halted. It trilled. From a far faint distance the trill echoed sadly. Suddenly I was afraid.

"He's warning them." Garth's face darkened. "Get ready."

We came into the clearing. Garth stared at the Karn village and from his mind I felt alternate waves of shock and fury.

The village was—splendid.

It was not merely the pagodas carved in stone lace, or the great basalt fountain tinkling in the square, or even the baby Karn playing by the fountain, their jeweled coats flashing. It was the overall impression of fabled antiquity and of peace.

But the proudest monument of Karn civilization was the towering wall at the far end of the square. Old was that wall beyond all reckoning, as old as the race. Garth stared at it unbelieving, at the bas-reliefs carved in green stone.

There was a giant Sorg, extinct for ten million years, pursuing a family of Karn. There were Tullians like myself, armed with ancient crossbows and battle-axes, slaughtering an unresisting Karn village. There was a spider-like monster, exuding a hideous aura of menace. Wars, conquests, defeats were graven on that wall, the story of Karn survival.

Beyond the village was the Karba planting field. It was sere and barren except for a few frost-withered plants. In the center of the village square the reception committee waited, two hundred adult Karn. Our Karn removed the leather seed pouch from its neck, went slowly across the square. I tried not to listen to the liquid murmurs.

Abruptly the entire village keened. It was a sobbing trill of sorrow, a soft pæan of misery. One very old Karn with a silver-blue pelt came forward and spoke.

I said, "They thank you for the seed. They will present us with the pelts in a few moments."

"It's a lie." Garth's mouth worked. "They're preparing to rush us."

Even his sonic pistol could not cope with the entire village. For all his cruelty, Garth was a brave man. But there was no attack. The old Karn waddled back to the assembly and the throng silently dispersed.

Suddenly there was a brief flurry behind one of the huts, a faint cry. Garth's smile grew into a grimace. "Get ready," he warned.

But it was only the old Karn. Across the square he came, dragging three shimmering pelts that were still warm and bloody. He held them outstretched, his dark eyes infinitely sad.

"Karns always keep their word," I said.

"It's some kind of trick," Garth said blindly. "They're animals!"

The old Karn spoke. I said, "The martyred Karn family will be remembered forever on the great wall."

Garth's smile was an awful thing. He pressed the remote control stud on his belt. I heard the distant snarl of the rocket.

With brutal deliberation Garth set the ship down squarely in the plowed Karba field. The assembled Karn watched it without fear or wonder. To them it was an artifact, nothing more. Long ago they had built such artifacts, then discarded them forever.

"I'll make them fight!" Garth said. "Tell them in two moons I return and destroy their village with flame from my ship. Tell them!"

I repeated the message numbly. Now surely we would die. But the old Karn gave a soft trill.

"The village sculptor wishes to do you homage," I said.

"Does he now?" Garth stared across the square, at a Karn with a pelt like black fire who was diligently chipping at the wall with a chisel, forming an outline.

"You see?" I said. "They have no word for hate."

"I'll give them one," Garth said. "Ho, sculptor! How's this for a pose?" He threw back his head arrogantly, holding the dripping pelts aloft.

The village was very still. There was only the chipping of a chisel on stone.

"Reach into their minds," Garth commanded. "Tell me what they *feel*."

Gently, I touched the Karn minds.

"They feel—awe," I told him. "They regard you as a truly great predator. Please tell them you were only jesting about destroying their village."

"I meant it!" The veins on Garth's forehead stood out like wales. "If only they had made some gesture of defiance, some effort to kill me—" He swallowed. "A rabbit culture doesn't deserve to survive."

It was the thing he lived by, his strength and his pride, and the Karn sculptor saw his expression and realized it was the best of all possible moments. Silver lightnings leaped from the end of his chisel and enveloped Garth like a halo.

In that first microsecond of awareness, Garth's hand darted for his sonic pistol. Then he stood transfixed as the silver nimbus hissed and crackled about his chest and legs.

From the Karn assembly came a trill of admiration. Garth stood frozen forever in an attitude of conquest, imperishable in green stone. A big man, worthy to take his place among the great predators on the Karn history wall.

★ ★ ★

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This planetoid was uncanny and it had its own built-in defenses.

Lethal Planetoid

By HARL VINCENT

ILLUSTRATED BY SUZANNE

The Engineers' Lounge of Ceres Fueling Base, deep in the recesses of the air-sealed station, was a comfortable place. Good bar, good companions. Excepting that this Stella Winters was watching the three men and she was a real annoyance to Ace Higgins.

Female explorers didn't turn him on, besides this one had natural red hair and green eyes. Ace was a redhead himself and he had good reason to beware of the fair sex anyway. So he didn't like this knockout looking him over. And he didn't see anything comic in the ribbing he was getting from his friends, Dick Bassett and Edgy Thomas.

They hadn't noticed the Winters woman trip over from the bar. A lady explorer with the looks and bearing of a debutante!

Bassett looked up lustfully as she came close and her scent was clear. Ace followed his gaze, fighting her allure.

Ace rose up lazily and almost negligently.

"I'd like to meet you, Asa Higgins."

Ace shifted uneasily, glowering his second-best glower.

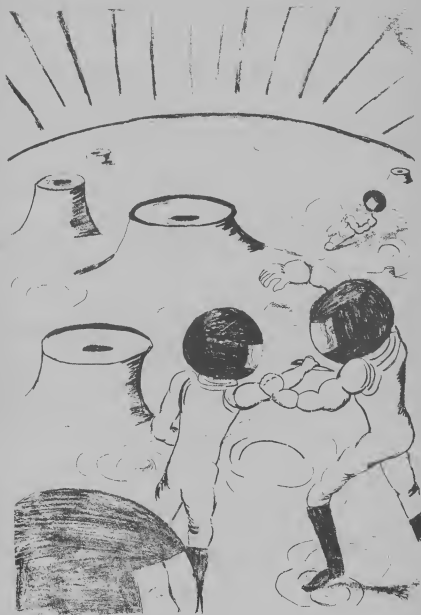
"I know, call you 'Ace,' not Asa. That what's bugging you?"

The big engineer's face reddened to match his hair. "Yes, call me Ace. Or don't speak to me at all, for all I care." He half turned away, pretending utter indifference.

"An Ace is what they used to call a bang-up pilot, isn't it" the irrepressible female asked, wide-eyed.

"Well, I'm not a pilot, I'm an engineer. Say, what is this anyway, a game?"

Ace sat down suddenly, abashed.



"That's better," breathed Stella Winters, cuddling up to him a little. "Now we can talk."

"You'll excuse us, I'm sure," said Dick Bassett, rising elaborately.

Ace verged on panic. "Hey, wait!"

But his two buddies stalked off, chuckling.

The girl rang for service. Ace wasn't sure how he ought to feel, exactly. He gazed grimly into the mocking green eyes that stared at him in the booth where they'd been moved. This gal sure had nerve, picking him up like this and making him a damn fool in front of his friends.

Neither spoke for several minutes, only staring. But finally, over their glasses, Ace softened, even cracked a faint grin. "What's this about?" he demanded.

The girl's fine features became impersonal. "Don't misunderstand me," she said. "I *was* a bit informal, but I needed to ask you a question. Want a job. A good one?"

"I have a job."

"Yes, second engineer on the *Atlas*. This one is better."

"I've had better ones."

"I know. First engineer on the *Andromeda*. Before that——"

"You seem to know a lot about me."

"I do. That's why I'm offering you a job." The suggestion of a smile hovered on the red lips.

"You want me to work for you?"

"Nothing else. You know my expeditions, know that I use a scoutster with only an engineer along."

"So you picked me?" It still seemed peculiar to Ace.

"I picked you, yes. But there are others who'd jump at the chance. I'll pay three times what you're getting now."

"Let's get this straight. You want me on the *Nomad*—that's your ship, isn't it? And it's a strictly business arrangement?"

"Strictly. A take-it-or-leave-it one. Be on the *Nomad* at thirteen-thirty tomorrow. Ask no questions. And there'll be a contract for a full terrestrial year. Is it a deal?"

"I'd say yes except for one thing." Ace was still cautious.

"Which is?"

"I don't hit it off with redheads."

Red-flecked green eyes locked with steady gray ones. "I don't either, Ace, so that makes us even. Just do your job—on that strictly impersonal basis."

"It's a go, then." Ace shrugged off his scruples.

The girl stood up and extended a firm hand. "All right, Ace. You'll follow my orders without question?"

"Naturally, working for you."

"Oke; we ship tomorrow." Stella let her hand fall.

"Right." Ace frowned as the proud figure moved off.

Then she was back, a twinkle in her eye. "One more little question, Ace. Do you know where your divorced wife is?"

"N-no." Stella was moving away again. From the movement of her shoulders, Ace knew she was laughing at him. "Hey, wait!" he called.

But she was gone. He scratched his flaming thatch, not at all sure now whether or not he wanted this job.

Besides, there was something he ought to be remembering about Winters, he was sure. Something not altogether pleasant—years ago. It troubled him vaguely, not remembering.

He didn't like to work for a woman. She'd boss him around, he was sure. But that wasn't what really bothered him. Ace loved a good argument and saw plenty of those ahead, so that part of it was okay. He just felt uncomfortable about it, that was all.

As he drew his final pay and quit the *Atlas* job, he kept wondering what and how Stella knew of Opal, his former wife.

His thoughts turned bitter. It was Opal's fault he'd lost out on the *Andromeda*. She'd persuaded him into the divorce, promising no scandal and that she'd not ask for a settlement. Not much she hadn't! She buzzed those round-eyed Martian judges and they'd slapped an interplan lien on his salary that was a doozy. The *Andromeda's* owners were sore and they'd let him go. After that the *Atlas* was the best he could get—until now.

His chronometer showed twelve-fifty when he arrived at the *Nomad* next day. He heard a group chattering in the middle of the pit, saw them surrounding Stella, and then was through the entrance of the vessel.

What a sweet job this ship was! Ace cast approving eyes over the control cabin, then was down the companionway to his own realm. All new, all modern machinery. *This* was a place to work. He peered into his sleeping cubby and whistled; it might have been the skipper's cabin on the *Andromeda*. Then he looked in the navigation room. The machine-shop was next, here too was perfection.

So absorbed was he that he hadn't noticed the gathering of the clan. "Hi, Asa! Asa Higgins! Come and take a bow."

Ace looked up ruefully. Dick, Edgy, a couple of greaseballs from the *Atlas*—and Stella Winters, her svelteness sheathed like a million, stood grinning down at him. The guys knew the "Asa" bugged him.

"Go fly a kite!" he retorted and ran for his own cubby.

"Oh, no you don't!" His four hecklers clattered down and headed him off. To cheers from the Winters woman, they bore him off, kicking, and out into the pit.

After that he had to take it and like it. The more they kidded the worse he felt. He mumbled a few words into the microphone and posed for a vid shot along with his new and long-famous boss. Then he kicked Dick's and Edgy's feet from under them.

"Good-bye, you mugs," he grinned and was off into the ship.

Winters was inside now too, waving through the ports at her admirers. Ace clamped the main port cover, came through the lock and bolted the inner seal. Then he stood regarding his new boss, who'd shed her finery and was in jumpers—just as fetching.

"Well," she said, with rising inflection, "what're you waiting for? You know I need power."

"Okay, boss," he said, annoyed she'd caught him staring, and clattered down the companionway.

He had power in seconds. The siren wailed outside. The great airlock was opening, making ready for their blastoff. Came the roar of an underside nuclear drive motor. Ahead was the inner door of the airlock. A hiss and they were inside. The Winters woman could maneuver a ship, that was for sure. The outer door of the lock slid open as the *Nomad* hovered; then, with a shriek, they were out and away from the four-hundred-eighty mile diameter planetoid.

The engine-room-voice-plate tinkled musically. "Come up here, Ace," came the now friendly tones of Stella Winters.

Her eyes were on the instrument panel, he noted as he entered. She spoke without turning, and Ace was surprised at her mild manner.

"Everything all right below?" she asked.

"Couldn't be better, Miss Winters. Or how do I address you?"

"Stella," shortly. "No ceremony, Ace, no intimacy either. How do you like the *Nomad*?"

"First class."

"Understand all the gadgets?"

"We're accelerating all right, aren't we?" Annoyed, he eyed the viewplate. Ceres was far astern.

Stella overlooked his tone. "Oh, I guess you know your job; I'd not have hired you otherwise. Get your things aboard all right?"

"Everything—last night." There *was* something about this redhead. Class, and she knew her job. He asked: "How about

our course? Don't I do orbital calculations and plotting, along with the engine-room?"

A change in the pilot's tone, her voice became cold and distant. "Ordinarily, yes—those are your duties. But on this first trip I'm navigating. You'll know where to when we get there—if we do."

Ace shrugged. "That's your privilege. But——"

"No questions," firmly. "Remember?"

Ace froze. Another time he'd take this redhead down a peg. Not now. The something he was trying to recall about her was bugging him, restraining him. He went below without another word.

He examined everything below decks, convinced this was the finest scoutster in space. Spares for every item of equipment. All machines in pairs, with relays to cut in the second unit if one failed. Duplicate controls both topside and below.

He watched the electronic transducer in the chart room. So she wouldn't tell him where they were bound? Peering into the maze of ellipses on the translucent surface, Ace located Ceres. From it there should have extended the red-lighted, lengthening curve of the *Nomad's* orbital course. It wasn't there; the Winters girl had disconnected the mechanism. Why the secrecy? Well, there were older and just as good ways to check a course. Ace wandered to the engine-room viewplate.

Their target star, he saw was in *Cygnus*. Acceleration 6.13 miles per second. With two later observations, he could calculate their course. Ace chuckled at the obtuseness of the feminine mind. Thought she could fool him, did she?

Came the drumming of a starboard blast and the target star swept away and out of sight. Stella'd changed course; his observations were useless. Obtuse? Not this femme.

They were holding to the asteroid belt and Winters still accelerated. She'd have to be good to avoid disaster.

Ace's thinking slowed. He blinked at the viewplate, saw a crazy blur of star patterns, then slumped easily beside the pedestal. Unconsciousness came abruptly.

When he came to, memory returned slowly. He lay on a comfortable bunk, clothed in spotless new dungarees. Stella had changed them?

He saw a lumenite wall and desk. It was his own cubby in the *Nomad*. He sat up abruptly to look into a pair of not unfriendly green eyes set in a perfect oval of a face with unbelievably smooth white skin and topped by that exquisite red-gold crown.

Ace wavered to his feet and regarded Stella owlishly. "So you drugged me, gassed me," he accused her. "What for?"

The green eyes flashed warning red flecks. "You're talking to the *Nomad's* master," she reminded him. "You can't question me."

"Oh yeah?" Ace forgot caution. "Dammit, I want to know what this is all about. You can't give me knockout whiffs and get away with it. I know my space law as well as you do."

"Forget it," she said, fighting for control. "You'll know the why of some things in a minute. I'll show you."

The toss of her head, the sinuous grace of her lithe young body as she turned, were not lost on Ace. Redhead or not, Stella had what it takes, and plenty of it. Ace followed her to a small saloon he hadn't noticed on his first inspection tour.

"In here," said Stella, opening the door.

Ace gasped, "Opal!" as a tiny blonde rose to greet him. Rad Noris, the Martian explorer was with her. "What's this mean?" Ace turned demanding to Stella but she wasn't there.

"It means," said his former wife sweetly, "your girl-friend rescued us from an asteroid on which we'd been marooned. She's taking us to the nearest port after Rad stakes out still another body he discovered."

"How do I fit into this?" Ace asked.

"Only as the *Nomad's* engineer." Opal eyed him provocatively.

"But we *do* need his promise of secrecy," Noris put in.

"Oh *that*," Opal tossed her mop of blonde hair. "Acey won't tell," she purred. Ruefully, Ace still thrilled to her wiles.

"Whatever you want kept secret, I'll do it," he assured her and, by a nod in his direction, the Martian.

Noris was an upstanding specimen, an inch taller than Ace and built in proportion. He had the red-gold skin of the Martian aristocrat. Eyes sharp but friendly, mouth straight, his nose classic. Of high type and Ace warmed to him, held out his hand.

"Thanks, Ace," Noris said; gripping hard. "We've found an enormous deposit of P-351*. A fortune. That's why the secrecy."

"It's safe with me, Opal can assure you."

"Oh, that's fine." Opal clapped her hands in the childish way that had intrigued Ace in the beginning, and later annoyed him.

It annoyed him now. Could he be jealous of Noris? Rot!

*P-351, the extremely rare alloy which is needed for gravigen-erator fuel.

"I suppose Stella told you to make yourselves at home," he offered for lack of conversation, then left for the control room.

An unwonted flush mantled Stella's smooth cheeks when she looked up from the controls.

"Now," said Ace, with no hint of servility or of rancor, "maybe you'll tell me some more. I think I know why you gassed me."

"Why?" Stella's flush deepened, heightening her beauty.

"You were afraid I'd upset the band-wagon if I knew you planned to pick up those two."

"You should be a detective," she chuckled. "Seriously, I *do* owe you an explanation. A woman's motives are sometimes unclear even to herself. Anyway, I got them."

Her eyes avoided Ace's. "I found them shipwrecked on this certain asteroid before going to Ceres to refuel. Left provisions, promised to return and pick them up. Noris told of a strange wandering body he'd found and wanted to claim. So I contracted to land him there to stake it out before getting a new ship to come back himself. That's our first assignment, yours and mine."

"Good girl."

The red flecks spattered through the green of her eyes once more. "What do you mean, good girl?"

Ace grinned, unabashed by whatever seemed like temper. "Fine business, I mean—the contract."

"Oh." Mollified, the girl played on the control keys and cut the acceleration. "It isn't far now," she told him.

"I'm told there's a fortune in P-351," Ace reminded her, "on that body."

"Oh," austerely. "Well, I don't want any; they need it more."

Ace couldn't make much sense of this. Guess he'd never understand females at all. He shrugged and changed tactics.

"Shall I go below and entertain the guests?" he asked, tongue-in-cheek.

"Up to you, Hig," coolly. "After all, Opal's *your* wife."

"Was," he corrected her, clumping down the companionway. Then suddenly that "Hig" smote him a wallop.

Of course! He hadn't been called "Hig" since high school days and then only by one gawky, long-legged, red-pigtailed brat named Estrella Wynczkowska. *She* was Stella Winters. He had called her "Polack" when they were kids. They'd scrapped like hell then. So now that she was mature and beautiful and famous she wanted revenge for his boyish pranks, did she? In the engine-room Ace cooled off, then started for the saloon to talk with Noris and Opal. He needed companionship.

Passing the chart room door, he decided to see if their course

now painted the redlit curve on the tracer chart. It did. The lengthening red line was on a short radius at first. The curve straightened out somewhat under the impulse of the port blasts whose repeated drumming he heard and then lanced off toward *Jupiter's* orbit.

The chart room door opened and Opal eased in. She faced him in garments suitable for the cocktail room of the *Andromeda*, but quite out of place on the *Nomad*. Too—well, distracting. Micro-mini. It was like Opal; she knew she had lovely legs . . . Ace wondered if the bait was for Noris or himself. Well, familiarity *hadn't* breed contempt.

"Ace," she said, latching the door, "may I talk with you?" "You're talking now."

"Oh be nice. Just because we've been through the courts is no reason we can't be friends."

"You've been through the courts; they've been through *me*." Ace couldn't hide his true feelings.

"Oh now Acey, let's forget that unpleasantness. Opal just *had* to be free to come and go and *do* things. You've been better off, I've been better off. Acey, you've a better job here with Winters—she pays you more than the *Atlas* did, doesn't she?"

Ace's eyes narrowed; so it was money. "Why yes," he admitted, "she does pay better. But why does that interest you?"

Opal purred as of old. "Why Acey, it's only that my—job—with Rad doesn't pay so much and the court awarded me so little."

"Little! You really *need* more?" Ace had always been soft. "But what about the P-351—don't you get your share?"

"No," she declared. "I only get a salary from Rad. I need more, I do." Opal talked fast and hotly. "If I could save up enough to finance expeditions—to be a lone explorer."

Ace stared. This was *something*; she was envious of Stella, wanting to excel her. Well, hell, let her try. After all, he supposed he *did* owe her something for those few physically satisfied years with her.

"I guess something might be done," he faltered. "I'll think it over. But not to go back into court."

"No, no, not that—*ever*." This sounded sincere. "It would be voluntary. Could you double what it's been?"

An inner voice warned Ace, though Opal's soft nearness had gotten to him as of old. "Maybe," he said. "I'll let you know."

"That's a sweet boy." She kissed him wetly. Ace felt himself slipping. "Sometimes," she went on dreamily, "sometimes, I'm almost sorry."

"I'm a sucker," Ace told the tracer chart.

His ardor cooled instantly. He was well aware of Opal's cupidity. She'd lied about the P-351; Noris would never hold out on that. She didn't need more alimony. What *was* she up to? Stella Winters had a reason when she'd said, "They need it more."

The *Nomad* was decelerating. Ace made his rounds, noting all was in order. He found Noris in the control room with Stella.

"But there's no charted asteroid in that area," she was saying.

"I know it," Noris agreed. "This is a wandering body only twenty miles in diameter."

"Then how do we locate it? It'll be a long way from where you found it. In which direction?"

"We can't miss it, Miss Winters, it's highly radioactive. We can pick it up twenty thousand miles away."

"Then why haven't others located it?" Stella persisted. "Every ship has long range radiation detectors."

"Not like mine. These particular radiations have an off-beat characteristic which I analyzed and provided for."

The pilot turned and saw Ace. She loosed a dazzling smile that made him gasp. He'd never been so favored. "Oh, hello Ace," she trilled. "Noris tells me we're getting near our objective."

Something was going on here. Ace thought one of Stella's lids drooped slightly, suggestively.

Noris had his own meter and was consulting a graph. "Yes," he said affably, "it's close by now. And you'll be surprised."

The Martian moved away, leaving Stella and Ace together. The engineer grinned into the girl's flushed face.

"So why put on an act in front of him, Polack?" he chuckled. He began to realize he was very fond of this new boss of his.

The flush vanished. A soft hand warmed his arm and there were no red flecks. "So you know?" Then, "He told me, Ace," Stella panted, "he told me—well, you know he's Opal's new husband—he told me she——"

A keening wail of tortured metal rose abruptly from below. Ace leaped down the companionway. Smoke curled up from the internal-gravity generator and before he could reach it there came a blinding flash and a thump that almost tore the high-speed unit from its foundation. Relays clicked to start the spare. But meanwhile the internal gravity lowered so that Ace couldn't keep his feet. A leap carried him across the engine-room to crash against the far wall.

"Hang on, everybody!" he shouted. "Don't try to move around until the spare's running. Then it'll be all right."

Holding to everything within reach, Ace got to the spare generator. Its automatic controls had it coming up to speed. He felt his weight increase and soon regained his footing. Then he looked over the wrecked machine.

A pinch-bar from the shop had shorted it, someone having done this deliberately. And there were only two who could have done it, Noris or Opal. Ace hid the bar and began investigating the extent of the damage.

All of them were soon there, watching. Opal, Stella and Noris. Babbling excitedly, yet somehow oddly restrained.

"What happened?" Stella demanded.

"Don't know yet," Ace stated. "A short of some kind. Burned out the field. Take a while to find out."

"It's your job to find out—but quick." Stella hadn't been like this a few minutes ago. "And to repair it at once. We can't carry on safely without both units available."

Ace straightened up, muscles jerking. Seeing Winter's eyes, he pinched his lips on the retort he'd been ready with. Not red-flecked eyes these but secretively smiling ones. He went back to work.

"I can help," Noris offered. The Martian was pale, his mouth a tight line. Opal fluttered in her helpless way. Helpless?

Ace was beginning to like Noris. Sorry for him too—married to Opal. "It isn't necessary," he advised the Martian. "Now scram all of you, so I can get to work."

When they left, he took the bar to the machine shop and examined it. It weighed six or seven pounds and would've made an ideal weapon. It could have been thrown to kill, either by Rad or Opal—missed and wrecked the machine instead. But such a thing just couldn't be. Or could it? Damn Opal! What did she mean, trying to hold him up for more dough when she had a new husband? It was a cover-up for some devilry, he knew damn well.

Returning to the generator, he soon had it dismounted. The rotor was practically unharmed, though needing straightening. The fuel chamber with its precious P-351 charge was intact but the field coils were masses of charred copper and mica tape. However, a complete set of replacement coils was in stock.

Ace worked desultorily but with precision. When this generator was back in service it'd be as good as new. No hurry.

After an hour in the machine shop he returned to the engineering room to micrometer the bearings. The external gravity unit was

being started by control from above. They were preparing to land on a body having little gravity. Just what Ace wanted, an excuse to stay behind when the rest landed, so he could trail them unnoticed. He loafed on the job.

And that was how it worked out, but not quite as he'd planned it.

Stella was the one who did the deciding, not he. Coolly she told him, "Complete the repair, Ace, before you set foot on this body. Even then, you're not to leave the vessel until one of us returns."

Ace looked up from his work angrily. He'd intended to *insist* on remaining behind; now he was hoist with his own petard. "Listen——"

The green eyes *were* red-flecked now. "You heard me!" The incomprehensible Stella stalked out.

Ace swore softly but feelingly at the hammer he held in his knotted fist. Didn't that sweet idiot know somebody'd tried murder or sabotage here? Was she kooky?

He finished after they'd been gone ten minutes. Satisfied, he checked the instruments indicating outside conditions.

The gravity, normally near zero, was boosted by their emanations to 0.75 Terra. No detectable atmosphere. He donned a spacesuit and was outside in a moment.

It was a bizarre scene. Ace had been on some of the small asteroids but never one like this. The horizon seemed almost in front of his face, the surface curvature being so abrupt. Off to the east, the sun was a small, rapidly moving, yet still flaming, globe with little heat to it.

The planetoid's surface glowed faintly a weird green. Under foot it was spongy, yielding to every step. It was patchworked to see, like an old-fashioned crazy-quilt of enormous size. Every fourth step carried him over a hump and into a depression where reposed a football-shaped object about two feet in length. Out of curiosity, Ace clasped gauntleted hands on one of these objects to see if it was fastened down. It was, but yielded elastically to his tug, then slumped resignedly back to its former position.

"Ugh!" Ace grunted into his helmet. "The thing's alive."

The echo of his own voice reminded him and he switched on his communicator. He heard voices at once. Those of Noris and the two women. By turning the loop atop his helmet, he found their direction, then stepped out gingerly over the hummucks.

There was something uncanny about this tiny world. Ace couldn't define it; perhaps it was those ugly, inert and yet alive, things in the depressions. Ahead one of the humps bulged up

slowly as if propelled by an internal force. It rose in a sort of twisted cone, its tip curling over and down until it entered one of the depressions where it hovered a moment and then slumped back into the surface. The whole planetoid was alive! Sustained by radiations of the P-351 and by the parasites it fed in the depressions. The hummucks were covered with tiny pore-like apertures and one couldn't doubt this betokened life. But why, and what kind of life?

The voices were nearer now. There were only two, those of the women, and they were angry voices.

"For once in your rotten life, Opal Noris, you'll play square," grated Stella Winters.

"You mind your business, Winters. I know what I'm doing," Opal retorted nastily.

"You'll lay off," snapped Stella, "or I'll maroon you here."

Where was Noris? Something very wrong here. Puzzled, Ace stumbled over the goo toward the voices, his blood chilling.

Came the sharp static crack of a proton blast in his helmet phones, a hollow despairing masculine groan. Noris of course. Opal must have a projector and shot him. For the P-351. She'd be getting Stella next. It simply *couldn't* have been Stella who shot. Ace slogged on desperately as the voices became incoherent.

Then he saw the women, tearing away at each other. "You will, will you?" Opal was shrieking. "I'll have Ace too, you——"

One of Ace's legs was gripped with clammy suction. He yanked away from an upcurling member just in time. This thing underneath was more than just alive, it was a killer. Death was here, swift and horrible. And where was Noris?

The women battled furiously, first one proton gun went flying, then another. Both girls armed! Which had really shot Noris—and by accident or intent? Where *was* the Martian? A hunting knife flashed in Opal's hand just as Noris's shout rang in Ace's helmet.

"Help!" called the Martian. "I'm wounded, caught. Ace! Opal!"

"Opal!" bawled Ace. "Drop that knife!"

Then he'd reached the women and, with a sweep of his arm, caught the descending blow and spun the blade from Opal's grasp. Snarling, he turned on his ex-wife as he tore them apart.

"There's your husband, hurt, in trouble!" he berated Opal. "Help him, if you're any good at all." At that point Ace doubted *all* women.

He could see Noris now, caught by an arm-like projection of

the living asteroid. The poor guy'd been trying to plant a flag. Ace plunged toward him.

"Come back!" Stella screamed. "Back to the *Nomad*; that's an order."

"To hell with it!" Noris needed his help.

It was a real nightmare after that. Those hummucks were rippling all over the surface now, as if roused by the humans' emotions.

"You go back!" Ace shouted at Stella who was lunging after him. Noris, enfolded in an obscene mass, threshed helplessly.

No reply from Stella, just one ringing scream in his helmet. Opal's voice calling, "Ace—A-Ace!"

And then Rad's thin voice: "Opal shot me, Ace. She wanted the P-351, the *Nomad*—and *you*. Stella tried to stop her—go to her . . . I——"

Noris's voice was cut off abruptly as the monstrous thing came up in an overhanging maw that swept down on the trapped Martian and bore him, covered with the sticky exudation down into a crater that suddenly formed and as suddenly closed over. No chance of rescue now.

Ace tore free of the clinging folds of wriggling matter and wheeled about. Opal, he saw, was struggling madly with the thing in whose folds she was caught, her screams ringing wildly in Ace's helmet. Stella grimly battled a trio of sucker-shaped appendages. Suddenly Opal was dragged down into oblivion.

Now it was a mad fight to save Stella's life and his own. They had only arms and legs to beat off the engulfing monstrosity. The football-shaped things reached for them as they fought the pseudopods that heaved up from the mother body. A ghastly, unequal fight. Ace waded to Stella and freed her from her original predicament, only to fall into another.

"Oh, Stella. Darling!" he panted. "Why did you follow me? Why didn't——?" Fear, and love for her welled up within him.

Then, as if satisfied with its two victims, the monster under them quieted. The hummocks smoothed to their former shapes, the footballs lay quiescent. Stella was limp in Ace's arms. With her, he staggered back to the ship, fell through the airlock, sealed it and dragged himself to the control room.

He stretched the unconscious girl on the floorplates and went after the controls frantically. Power first! He heard the machines below respond. Then he blasted away from the obscene thing which was the tomb of one first-class explorer and one fifth-rate woman.

What a fool he'd been, what a sucker for Opal! But not so

much as poor Noris, who'd died at her hands. What a game she'd played, all ends for the middle! Planned to get rid of Stella and Noris, grab the P-351—though God only knew how she expected to get to it—and sweet little Acey, along with the *Nomad*. She'd wrecked the generator to keep him busy while she did her dirty work. But why had Stella tried to keep him on the ship too?

Away from the monstrous asteroid-thing, Ace locked the controls and turned to where Stella lay. She was regarding him through her glassite helmet with wide-awake eyes that showed no red flecks and were now moistly tender. Admiring eyes, adoring and adorable.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Ace demanded with mock severity. Why had he ever quarreled with or doubted this incomparable creature?

"Don't talk to me like that, you lug," Stella grinned. "What do you suppose? I wanted you to see for yourself. Nobody could have told you. And if you can't figure out the rest I'll just have to give up."

"Why'd you make me stay behind?" Ace tried to act dumb.

"*Make* you! I knew you'd finished the repair. I just wanted to see what you'd do. And I was afraid for you. I was armed, you weren't. And—and——" The voice behind the glassite broke and the feminine idol of the Explorers' Club was just a sobbing, altogether human and desirable woman.

Ace knew now, blindingly, breathlessly, how he loved and needed her. He found himself with the bulky spacesuited figure in his arms. This was no good, not yet, but Stella was fumbling with the zipper seals. Anxiously.

"She lied to you, cheated you," the girl sobbed. "I know—so—anyway, I've loved you all these years, Hig. Watched your career. Wanted to die when you married her. It was then I went space-hopping. To forget. I couldn't let her gyp you again. Not now. So, so——"

He helped her shakily with the zipper seals.

"Shut up, beautiful," said Ace, ever so softly, "and take off that helmet so that I can kiss you—*first*. But good."

It was fortunate that Ace Higgins had set a free, screen protected course and that the automatic controls of the *Nomad* functioned perfectly, silently, and unobserving for a long long time after that.

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A
LETTER
FROM
MR. SCI-FI



Mr. Science Fiction is 51-year-young Forrest J. Ackerman who in 42 years of devotion to the field of imaginative literature and motion pictures has collected approximately 100,000 related items and turned his 13 room home into a museum to display them, a sense of wonder world that George Pal has called "the most interesting house on earth," a futura fantasia from which Ray Bradbury has declared "I never want to escape."

Ackerman himself has contributed over 500 articles and short stories ("The Mute Question" reprinted and translated perhaps a dozen times) to the professional magazines and countless more to the fanzines. Into his hands he received from Isaac Asimov the first Hugo ever awarded. When stf. historian Sam Moskowitz eventually researches the origin of the abbreviation for science fiction most widely used in the world today—sci-fi—we believe he will find it first appeared professionally in the June 1955 issue of SPACEWAY.

A Letter from Mr. Sci-Fi will be a regular feature in SPACEWAY. Hugo Gernsback himself, Father of Scientifiction, was wont to call his fervent admirer the Son of Scientifiction, and in 1950 recognized him as "the pioneer science fiction authority in the United States" when he so inscribed a copy for him of his famous "Ralph 124C41+." We think you will look forward to and be entertained by the memories, the opinions, the news that Forrest Ackerman has to convey to YOU. —Editor.

* * *

Dear Reader

I remember a story by the late Ralph Milne Farley (née Roger Sherman Hoar) called "The Man Who Was Two Men," and as I write these lines I feel like the (Ackerman) man who's two: one of

me in the front room, entertaining guests; the other sits here at a typewriter, writing you. How is this possible? Ask Thomas Alva Edison. A color *image* of me is in the front room, speaking—acting—in the company of Fritz “A Spectre is Haunting Texas” Leiber and Bjo (The Girl Who Saved *Star Trek*) Trimble. It is a little amateur fantasy film we made many years ago, called *The Genie*, where I conjure up a demon and, you should pardon the Blochian expression, after that things for me go on the Fritz . . . (Leiber Gott! The pun is mightier than the swordcery!)

A few nites ago KING KONG & THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (now there's an Odd Couple) were breaking up New York and breaking the heart of Boris Karloff in 2 vintage scientific films being shown in my livingroom while, once again, I was chained to the *skribmashino* (Esperanto). The tragedy of my existence is that I do not have 25 hours a day to enjoy s.f. as a fan rather than work at it as a pro. Watching the films while I was busy were Takumi Shibano, the No. 1 SF fan from Japan (he says they rarely call it “science fiction” there and never heard of “sci-fi”—almost exclusively, their term is simply “SF”); Hank Stine, new LA writer whose s.f. novel “Season of the Witch” will soon be hardcovered by Essex House; W. N. Dane, editor-translator for Ace pocket-books of “Perry Rhodan: Peacelord of the Universe,” the series sensation of Europe (approximately 350 published there to date!); John Trimble, superfan; Larry Niven, Hugo winner, whose “Organleggers” is coming soon in *Galaxy*; Bill Warren, who recently made a first sale to *Worlds of Fantasy*; and several others. At the conclusion of BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN there were cries of “author! author!” and while Mary Shelley was unable to favor us with an appearance I did reminisce about the dear dead days (and dead Colin Clive) of 1935 when, still a late teenager, I was invited to Universal Studios to see THE BRIDE previewed. That day I also saw a screening of a chapter of the Otis Adelbert Kline serial CALL OF THE SAVAGE based on his *Argosy* serial “Jan of the Jungle.” Buster “Flash Gordon” Crabbe played the apeman. In 1935 or thereabouts we were promised that we would see Boris Karloff in scientific films that never materialized such as A TRIP TO MARS and THE BILLIONAIRE and AUTOMATON, the latter based on a story in *Amazing* by Abner J. Gelula, a writer who appeared briefly on the sci-fi scene and disappeared.

Abner J. Gelula. Imagination or reality?—it seems to me even the *names* of the authors were more scientific sounding, more glamorous. In The Beginning before there were waves, old or new, only occasional crests on what was generally a vast

sea of indifference. Magic names—whether they always produced what the sound of them promised, I do not say, but where today do you find a monicker like Hendrik Dahl Juve? George Allen England. Lowell Howard Morrow. J. Harvey Haggard. Lilith Lorraine. Francis Flagg. Clare Winger Harris. Aladra Septamo. Charles Williard Diffin. Sewell Peaslee Wright. Homer Eon Flint. Edgar Rice Burroughs! Clinton Constantinescu!! Epaminondas Thucydides Snooks!?! I note the use of a middle name in auctorial circles has dwindled. Otherwise we might have an R. Douglas Bradbury, R. Anson Heinlein, A. Elton van Vogt, D. Allen Wollheim, F. James Ackerman—! (No! There are some things Man was Meant to Leave Alone!)

A definitive book about Edgar Rice Burroughs is currently underway by Irwin, brother of Arthur "Ruum at the Top" Porges, author of the well-received biography of Edgar Allen Poe published by Chilton in 1963. During research at the Burroughs offices in Tarzana, some fan letters to ERB were unearthed, ebullient praise from a boy in San Francisco in 1929 or 1930, telling how his English teacher frowned on the works of Burroughs and wdn't permit the boy to write a book review on one. Like yesterday I remember Miss King saying to me, "Come back in 5 years, Forrest Ackerman, and you'll admit to me that Shakespeare is better than your Edgar Rice Burroughs." Greatest mistake Miss King ever made, because of course I *did* go back 5 years later to tell her that a lustrum elapsed had not changed my opinion about the illustrious Bard and that I still considered a Bard in the hand wasn't worth an Erb in the bush. To this day I still find Burroughs more entertaining than Bill of Avon. Alright—so I Am a Barbarian!

1968 must surely go down in the history of sci-fi as the year the Grim Reaper went wild with his scythe-powers. Chopped down in his prime was one of fandom's favorite sons, actifan & "traveling jiant," Ron Ellik. Bitterly taken from us was multi-talented Tony Boucher, one of the last of the gentle Gentlemen. Emphysema—a disease I'd never heard of till it took my friend Harl Vincent—several months later ended the career of Groff Conklin at 63. Groff was one of the pioneers and All Time Greats in the s.f. anthology field as well as, within my experience, a model individual to deal with as an agent. Harl Vincent—Harl Vincent Schoepflin (pronounced Sheflin) was the first author who ever favored the request of the 11-year-old fan who was myself in 1928 when I wrote and asked for an original manuscript. He sent me "The Golden Girl of Munan," his first published story, and I still have it. At that time he lived nearly 3000 miles

from me; during the last years of his life, he lived about 3 minutes away and dropped in on me frequently. He had a story published for every year of his life, 74, and a few more, and left enough for several posthumous publications. Perhaps his greatest achievements were the 2-part "Red Twilight" in *Argosy* and the novel "Venus Liberated" and its sequel "Faster Than Light" in early *Amazing Stories Quarterly*s.

(Now the late Dick Powell is living again, in my livingroom, in a revival — 16mm film, not TV — of IT HAPPENED TOMORROW, based in part on something by Lord Dunsany. Powell, as I recall, was born on my birthday—or I on his—Nov. 24.) This Nov. 23, the indestructible Frankenstein monster himself, beautiful Boris Karloff, will celebrate his 81st birthday. He was recently in "Horrorwood" where he played his roles in no less than 4 fantastic films, the last being THE INCREDIBLE INVASION—no relation to the Murray Leinster novel of the same name. I wonder if Leinster will contemplate suing if this title is retained? He did a thousand years ago, in my youth, when MGM cast Clark Gable & Jean Harlow in RED DUST, and Leinster contacted me because he had a story of the same name in *Amazing*. In any event, while in Hollywood Karloff had dinner at an evening at which I was privileged to be present, in the company of METROPOLIS Lang in the home of Robert (anything but PSYCHO) Bloch. I think it wd be a marvelous gesture if thousands of science fiction fans wd send congratulations this year to the trouper who, with half a lung gone and dreadful arthritis plaguing him, resolutely goes on acting, determined to die with his greasepaint on (he's told me this himself) as long as the world wants him. He's delighted millions with his characterizations as the 3700-year-old living mummy Im-ho-tep; Dr. Fu Manchu; Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde; The Man With 9 Lives; The Walking Dead; The Man Who Lived Again; the victim of The Invisible Ray; and scores of others, including the adaptation of Wm Sloane's excellent "Edge of Running Water," known on the screen as THE DEVIL COMMANDS. Anyone wishing to send a card of congratulations to our eminent octogenarian should mail same about Nov. 13. Put 20 cents worth of stamps on the envelope (if it weighs under half an oz.; 40 cents if a full ounce), plainly mark it AIRMAIL, and address it: BORIS KARLOFF c/o Forrest Ackerman, POB 35252 Preuss Station, Los Angeles, Calif. 90035. I'll volunteer to forward all greetings to the grand old man in London.

Rosel George Brown, who wrote "Sibyl Sue Blue" (fast action in 1990), died.

Looking for something to buy, want to sell something in the sci-fi field? POB 550, Evergreen, Conn. 80439 is the address that will be your Open Sesame. Just write C. Cazedessus Jr there—tell him you read in SPACEWAY he wd send you a free copy of The Fantasy Collector. About 40 pages of fascinating ads per monthly issue. And if you'd be interested in a fine filmonster fanzine send 60 cents for a sample of Photon to Mark Frank, 801 Ave., C, Brooklyn, NY 11218. Tell Mark the Ackermmonster sent you and he may include a free pint of blood.

Watch your marquee for these re-marquee-ble films: Ray Bradbury's ILLUSTRATED MAN (includes a sequence on Venus). Gregory Peck, MAROONED on the Moon. 40,000 years in the future with female Flash Gordon BARBARELLA. Lord Dunsany's LAST REVOLUTION (robots v mankind). LOGAN's RUN (youthanasia in the 21st Century). Frederik Pohl's THE TUNNEL UNDER THE WORLD. TOM SWIFT. BUCK ROGERS. FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED. TIME-RUN by Wm. Nolan, adapted from Ray Bradbury's "Fox and the Forest." RETURN TO THE PLANET OF THE APES. SKULL-DUGGERY (adapted from Vercours' "Ye Shall Know Them"). Heinlein's STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND. THE VALLEY—TIME FORGOT (Ray Harryhausen animation). WHEN DINOSAURS RULED THE EARTH. IMPLOSION. And an updated THINGS TO COME!

Hey, Hollywood! How about casting Mia Farrow in Olaf Stapledon's SIRIUS? Yvette Mimieux in TO WALK THE NIGHT? Either Yvette or Mia as the Amphibian in THE WORLD BELOW? Nancy Sinatra as SIBYL SUE BLUE? Charlton Heston in van Vogt's VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE? Richard Burton in (of course not as) SLAN.

Is there's something you'd like to know about science fiction? Willy Ley answers questions about scientific subjects in *Galaxy*; let me put my 42 years of interest in the scientifiction field to work for you, here in these pages, and answer some (I can't guarantee all, in case there's a Second Deluge) of your inquiries. Just address them to Forrest J. Answerman, POB 35252 Preuss Station, Los Angeles, Calif. 90035.

Yours Siencereely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Forrest J. Answerman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.

BLOCK PARTY

By WILLIAM S. CORWIN

¶ It could almost be said that all human life is based on a series of thought conditionings—and quite frequently this conditioning may be predicated upon entirely erroneous concepts....

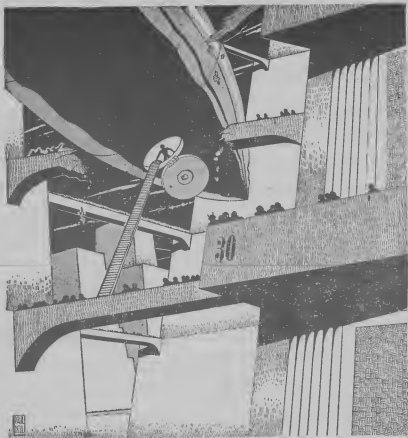
ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

THE city was a thing of growth gone mad. It had its Beauty, but it was a massive, balanced sort of beauty owing more to geometry than to art. Its buildings were mounting, block-wide piles of metal and masonry and warm, clear crystal in rainbow colored fusion, towering above the streets in setback terraces like the walls of chasms. Each terrace was a thoroughfare linked by long ramps with the one above and the one below, and crossways looped from terrace to terrace at every level, lacing the city with a lattice of steel. Terraces, streets, crossways, ramps all bore their fractions of the mill of traffic swirling from the highest rooftop to the street and far out of sight below ground. Leagues overhead the streets were echoed in a net of sky from which the city caught light; shone in it, intensified it, sent it down from level to level to the streets' deepest reaches.

Handler was off duty. Sturdy and squat and built for lifting, he lumbered along in the crowd on a thirtieth level crossway, moving with the slow shuffle characteristic of his caste.

Just past the center of its span Arsman idled near the edge of the crossway out of the press, intent upon the boil of movement below. Handler angled across traffic to Arsman's side. They stood in silence for awhile, like spiders on a thread of web spun from face to face of a crevasse in a cliff, unmindful of the never resting wind of the higher levels thrumming the metal surface beneath them, oblivious to the ceaseless passing and repassing behind them.

When at last they spoke, inevitably their theme was the



preëminence of man. It was the fundamental concept of their civilization. For thirty centuries no other had engaged more of their thoughts and speculations. Whole schools of thought had been founded upon it; had risen and fallen and fought and debated and disputed, split and reunited over it. Not over the fact of it; that had never been challenged. Rather over interpretations of it.

Handler and Arsman did not argue. Their minds moved in identical patterns, and theirs was a communion of beautiful accord. What they said was like an antiphonal repetition of the responses of a well remembered ritual.

"Man is the flame in darkness," Arsman chanted. "Man is the bearer of torches, the lighter of shadowed ways."

"Man is the dreamer," Handler responded. "Man is the builder."

Picket was the thirtieth level block patrol guard on duty at the crossway approach. He saw Arsman and Handler meet. When they began their chant he spoke sharply into the closed beam of Control.

"Station fifty-two, level thirty. Picket calling A."

"Control A. What's your trouble, Picket?"

"Same old thing. A couple of them are at it again on my crossway. Right in the middle, as usual."

"All right. Hold on and we'll shoot over some specials."

"Just so they get here before things start cubing up. The whole force won't help any then. Remember what happened on the sixtieth. Fifty-two thirty, Picket out."

Picket had reason to worry. Already off-duty idlers were closing up on Arsman and Handler, attracted by their counter-punctual harangue. More were drifting up the crossway approaches. The normal traffic of the crossway was slowing noticeably. Crossways were designed to support triple their normal load, but Picket had seen them collapse before in these same circumstances. When one of these love feasts really got under way there was no telling where it would end.

"Man is the child of the universe; man is its master," boomed Handler, picking up the tempo.

"Man *is* the universe. The universe is man!" Arsman roared.

"Man is heir to the stars!"

"Man is lord of space!"

The words resounded the length and breath of the street. Arsman and Handler were adapting their communicators as amplifiers. Picket fumed. He could not leave his station before the specials came. Yet if someone didn't soon get out in that crowd it would be eternally too late. As long as they remained a passive audience they could be managed. Once they joined in the responses the job would be almost impossible. Since the superiority of man was the one unquestioned truth of civilization, no one could deny them the right to proclaim it.

"Fifty-two thirty. Picket calling A. What's the matter with those specials?"

"Control A. They're on their way."

"They better be! If you don't get a move on you'll have to shut down the street."

Even as Picket spoke mobile special units flashed up ramps on each side of the street and along the level thirty terraces, ultrasonics at full pitch, stimulators directed ahead to clear the way, depressors laterally to keep it clear. They swung to a halt blocking the crossway approaches. They were too late.

"Stand by A," Picket barked over the Control beam. "Stand by!"

"Man is the spirit!"

"MAN!"

"The spirit is man!"

"MAN!"

Some of the listening throng took up the refrain. In another moment they were in full chorus. They began to surge in unison with every shout, edging into an hysteria of emotional catharsis. The crossway swung, gathering momentum with each impulse until it was whipping like a towline in a full gale at sea. Traffic was starting to mill on crossways at three other levels.

Now that the crisis was at hand Picket spoke to Control quietly.

"All right A. It's going into emergency. Block alarm! Block alarm!"

Gongs sounded deeply through amplifiers all up and down the street. Special units flashed out of nowhere, blocking ramps and crossways and clamping isolation on the block. Metal sheets sighed down to cover every opening in the buildings.

"How does it look?" Control demanded.

"How does it look?" Picket echoed. "It looks like a bitch kitty! You'd better give them the works."

"MAN IS TRUTH!"

The full throated words thundered and rolled and crashed high and low, near and far the length of the street.

"MAN IS LIFE! MAN IS EARTH! MAN IS HEAVEN!"

The rest was lost in interference howls as Control cut in the main suppressors. Picket hastily adjusted his dampers. At the same moment maintenance units swarmed out along the catwalks running bolster cables beneath the crossways. The pandemonium crescendoed while a man might have counted twenty slowly, until the bedrock stirred and buildings throbbed.

Ecerily, faintly, a deep rising tone whispered out of the high sky; rose and lifted to a tearing scream that overrode all other sound.

Unthinkably far above a flame splinter winked. Like a dart of light a red-glowing ship crashed into the atmosphere at frantic speed; down, down into the gape of the street until its shadow flitted over the multitude.

Still it plummeted irresistibly on, tearing into the city, snapping crossways like oatstraws. Picket activated the city-wide alarm. Again the vibrant tendrils of brazen gong strokes probed the air. Sound and movement went out of the street together like the snuffed flame of a candle.

Only the falling ship continued its thundering, ripping descent. Down and down it fell leaving a yawning, ragged-rimmed tunnel swept clear from the sky to mark its passing. But it was slowing, the very violence of its own titanic impact dissipating its tremendous inertial energy.

At the twenty-first level the taper of the buildings no longer gave the gorge of the street the width to accommodate the ship's bulk. The terraces caught it, but it plowed on into metal and solid masonry. At last it rested, its shadow blanketing the group on Picket's crossway and darkening the street for rods around. Handler and Arsman were just beneath its hull, their paean to the perfection of man forgotten.

Slowly, slowly, like a frozen river thawing, the street came back to life. At the higher levels maintenance units began rerigging broken crossways. Debris vanished from the terraces under the deft scrapers of the disposal units. Obeying a compulsion beyond even the tremendous wonder of the alien ship's advent, traffic moved again in a quickening tempo over and around and under the titanic intruder.

Only in the immediate vicinity of the wreck at levels from twenty-five to thirty-five there was no change beyond an inch by inch convergence upon the ship. In its shadow Arsman and Handler were swallowed up among the multitude closing around them.

"Fifty-two thirty, report please. Fifty-five thirty, report—forty-eight thirty-one—fifty thirty-four—forty-six thirty-nine—report—report."

Control called its guards at the various levels in the affected area, but for once they were beyond the constraint of duty.

The hulk lay deathly still now, canted slightly in its bed of wreckage. Its metallic shell glowed dully, scorched and etched with a record of its adventures, snapping and sighing as it cooled over the

rising normal tumult of the street. For long minutes it lay as it had fallen, the focus of an ever-growing crowd creeping steadily near it against the efforts of guards recalled at last to their charge. Picket had given over his station to one of the specials and was battling in the thick of it, where he should be.

Handler and Arsman were holding their own against their encroaching fellows. Still from their point of vantage they stared up awed and unmoving at the vast hulk slanting directly over them. It hung so near they could make out its every detail.

While they gazed, low in the side of the hulk turned toward them a convex disk began noiselessly to spin. Out and out it wound its massive, glistening screw until at last it came free and lurched aside on giant arms. A ramp, tiny by comparison with the bulk from which it emerged, slid into view and dropped down groping for the terrace edge. A long, deep murmur sighed up from the watchers.

Something stirred in the dimness of the lock, and then flopped, shapeless and suety, into sight. It was a horror beyond horror. It was dwarfish and pulpy and pale and misshapen. Its skin seemed to be limp and flaccid and a clash of colors. Two of its malformed legs hung down slackly; two others fumbled grotesquely for footing on the ramp.

It was terrible to see a thing which should have crawled on all fours standing on two legs. Even caged apes in the giant zoo of the three hundredth—the ground—level were more bearable. At least they hid some of their unsightliness with hair.

Hate and revulsion welled up in Arsman. Somewhere deep within him a long disused mental door creaked open. A dormant pattern of conditioning that had somehow survived in him through uncounted generations leaped from it.

"It is a space thing!" he clarioned.

Then he did a thing he had not known he could do. He sucked up the great power beam, funneling it into a thread of intolerable energy for a weapon he had not known he possessed. A pencil of whiteness whipped out from it flicking at the alien. The thing boiled and shrivelled and whimpered a terrible, fleeting cry. It fell and rolled to the foot of the ramp like a bag of scorched oily rags.

Arsman played his blast up the side of the hulk, diffusing it just inside the lock in a way he knew instinctively—although he did not know how he knew it—would permeate every square foot of the ship's interior.

Picket called up all his reserves of strength to beat through the throng.

"All right!" he bellowed. "You've done it now. You're under arrest, Arsman. You too, Handler," he added a bit unreasonably. "It was you started all this."

He turned and went back toward the crossway approach, Handler and Arsman following docilely. At his station he stopped and beamed Control.

"Report at once!" the order snapped out at Picket as soon as he cut the beam.

"The hell with it!" Picket grated. "Send me a vet. I think these fools have killed them all."

"All what?" came back the startled question.

"All the space things."

"Space things?" Control repeated doubtfully. "Look here, Picket, what's going on down there anyway? We're all in the dark. We haven't had an understandable report in the last half hour."

"I'll get the special to fill you in. Right now I want that medman and I want him fast!"

"Just as you say. But remember, there's bound to be an inquiry over this, and you'll be the one to suffer if you can't justify your actions to Central."

"I'll risk it. Just get that vet on his way!"

"We started a unit off a minute ago. They should be there by now. Well, it's your funeral! Control A out!"

Even as Picket cut out of the beam a med unit came up at speed. From his insignia Picket identified the first of them to reach him as one of the city's few remaining original medmen, which meant he was not only senior in the Veterinary Service but also that he was, in the days when they had such things, a physician. Plainly Control was taking a more serious view of the episode than they admitted. Senior medmen were subject to call only in the gravest emergencies.

"This way, sir."

The crowd opened respectfully for the incredibly ancient senior as he hurried toward the ship ahead of Picket.

"Whatever you've got here," he stated ominously, "it had better be good."

"I think it'll do, sir," said Picket drily. "Here's the first of them."

Muttering illnaturedly to himself, the vet bent over the crumpled thing at the foot of the ramp. After a moment his complaint trailed

off into an exclamation of surprise and interest. He continued his examination in silence for a long time then, and when he straightened from it, it was with a palpable aura of excitement.

"You say there are more of these?" he demanded eagerly.

"I don't know, sir. But I think there must be. One of them could hardly have managed that machine alone."

"I dare say you are right," the medman agreed. "You there! Tracker!" he beckoned to the smallest onlooker in the front rank of the crowd. "Come here and see if you can make it up this ramp. Yes, you!"

As Tracker came forward rather undecidedly, the old medman bounced up to him and took hold of him.

"Come on! Come on," he ordered, hurrying Tracker impatiently. "I haven't got all day!"

Tracker started up the ramp gingerly. It was all he could do to climb it in spite of his slight stature. The ramp was narrow for him and frail even for his small bulk. The lock at the top was scarcely wide enough to let him pass.

There was a curiously still interval; then Tracker reappeared in the opening carrying another of the space things. He tipped forward cautiously letting the limp alien topple out so that it slid on down the ramp. The medman pounced eagerly.

One by one Tracker emptied the ship of its crew. The medmen laid them out in a row across the little space left clear by the instinctive recoil of the bystanders until there were nineteen of them. The senior moved about uneasily—almost distractedly—from one to another of them, continuing an increasingly querulous soliloquy of which only occasional exclamations of "incredible" or "unbelievable" rose into intelligibility.

Ultimately Tracker came to the lock empty-handed. He bent out and peered down.

"That's the lot," he announced, and began carefully edging back to the terrace.

The medman stopped his pacing at once.

"Pack them up," he commanded his assistants preëptorily. "We must have them where we can give them a real examination."

He turned and retreated along the crossway much less slowly even than he had come. Picket hurried after him. This was the biggest adventure Picket had ever had. He had no intention of relinquishing it now. When they reached his station he stopped.

"Just a minute, sir," he requested respectfully.

"What is it now?" the medman demanded irascibly.

"I'll have to go along with you, sir."

"Eh? Go with me!"

"Yes, sir. It's regulations, sir."

That was sheer bluff. The situation could not be considered covered by the remotest extension of the Code, but Picket had a shrewd notion the vet knew as little about codes as Picket himself knew about medicine. He was right.

"Well," the senior conceded, fuming visibly at the prospect, "if you must, I suppose you must. But be quick!"

"Take over here until I get back," Picket ordered the special at his station. He considered Arsman and Handler thoughtfully. "You two had better come along," he decided. "I don't want you getting mislaid. All right, sir. Let's go."

The room under the vast floor area of the zoo was itself lofty and spacious, but it seemed crowded to Picket. He was uneasy in the great light beating into every corner of it from the floods far up against the ceiling. There was a smell to the place he did not care for, and machines scattered about it he distrusted. He was wondering if his coming there were such a happy idea after all.

The alien things from the wreck were laid out on a long stone table down the middle of the room. They had lost none of their repellency in death. They were even less attractive than they had been alive, particularly now that the vets had cut and removed what Picket had taken for their skin, but what now appeared to be some sort of limp artificial casing, laying bare their true hairless, grayish pallidity. Picket and his prisoners huddled away from the table, standing stiffly together for mutual reassurance.

As he and his brace of assistants worked, the senior medman delivered a running commentary on the bodies, part analysis, part instructions to his aides.

"Yes, definitely animal life forms. Organic, you observe. Heart—four chambers. Lungs, veins, arteries—air breathers of one sort or other, I believe. Look at that spine! Erect bipeds—not naturally but evolved. Muscle, nerve, cartilage, adipose tissue. Surely I have worked with things very like these before. Ah—give me that. The brain. Now we shall get at it. Hmm—"

His dissertation trailed off into an increasingly concerned mutter. Layer by layer he stripped the bodies, testing their fabric, absorbing

their pattern, correlating it against half-forgotten standards dredged painfully up from a dim, disused corner in his memory of a time long gone by.

He worked ever more slowly and carefully; returned again and again to verify his findings. His assistants caught his mood, tightening with his uncertainty sympathetically. Something of it touched even Arsman and Handler and Picket. They stood awkwardly, a little apart, following with a sort of fascinated revolt every deft movement of the three vets as they stooped at the table, cutting and delving and slicing with their probes and scalpels.

"Good Lord!"

The senior medman's exclamation had the impact of a bursting grenade. The little group in the examination room were shocked into utter stillness. They stared at him unmoving, while he stared down at the half-dismantled thing beneath his instruments. At last he straightened and turned. For the first time it seemed to Picket that the old Medman's movements betrayed the wear of all his centuries of being.

"These are not 'space things,'" his monotonous voice was subtly awed and shaken. "These are men!"

Men!

Picket recoiled from the examination table, his rollers burring abruptly on the metal floor. Arsman shifted his armored hulk uncertainly from track to track. Handler shuffled his traction plates, producing a sibilant, sliding noise. White and amber lights alternated behind the vents of the medman's turreted brain.

They were the same company still, but each had withdrawn into himself, groping for reassurance in the chaos of his world tottering on its foundations—every ineradicably instilled instinct of his conditioning, the very fundamental principle of his existence crying out in horrified guilt against the blasphemous enormity of the thing which they had done.

Men!

They had slain their creators.

* * * * *

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THE SHELL DOME

By H. B. FYFE

Zhufegh was a trading planet . . and they had
the "goods" to prove it!

ILLUSTRATED BY CINDY SMITH

WHAT IS IT, Jollok? Oh, the visitors from interstellar space, the two of them, eh? Bring sponge mats, and mind they are suitably sopping!

Now, then, sirs? Gentlemen? Is either the correct term? I know that I speak your so-called *lingua galactia* but poorly. It is that my speech organs are in their structure influenced by our undersea origin, but I hope to make myself understood.

I do? Thank you. Please to take a sponge mat. Lie, sit . . . whatever you do. My, but you are flexible—Your pardon! I should say . . . let me see . . . supple?



Yes, it is me, the shell, my exterior. I am not as immovable as may seem to beings possessed of your four powerful limbs, so strong that in our gravity you need only two to move about. Still, I can extend my foot, which has many, many small muscles to creep along the ground, and there are also little . . . doors . . . in my carapace through which I can put out arms—you would call them tentacles, I believe.

What is the matter? You would prefer them more dry? Ho, Jollok! Squeeze out the sponge mats! And spread the water evenly; the floor is almost dry enough to be sticky.

Yes, it is of shell grown for us by domesticated creatures, as is the rest of the dome, although we use metals and other materials for decorative partitions sometimes. You must pardon Jollok's clumsiness, if you will be so forgiving. He makes a very useful house attendant for all of his limited intelligence. As you may have surmised, we obtained him from a planet several light years from here.

Yes, space traders. They made us a present of him. I could not bear to part with him now. With those six heavy tentacles, he is almost as mobile as yourselves and very willing to be of service.

Oh, forgive me! In my excitement at greeting visitors from who shall guess what depths of space, I have displayed the aridity of mind to omit introductions. My name is Ueshlepp, and we call our world Zhufegh.

How is it? Richard Bralier, of the planet Terra? You must explain to me where that is later. And Phyllis Montoya. Welcome to Zhufegh. I feel Phyllis to be a pleasing name, one which vibrates soothingly upon the auditory membranes.

Ears? Those? You truly hear with those? I, on the other course, have a long row along the edge of my carapace . . . here. And you get along with only two—remarkable! What occurs should one be bitten off, or otherwise injured? Can you then walk or swim straight?

Well, to be sure, I am getting out of the main current. We must exchange such knowledge later. First, it is to see that you are comfortable. Please allow for my ignorance of your needs. We on Zhufegh have many visitors from space (you will afterwards meet a few) and the variety of customs is indeed bewildering. I can only inquire if you desire darkness, light, food, warmth, opportunity to lay eggs—

What have I said? How is it that one of you is able to change his color?

Oh . . . her color? Remarkable! I did—forgive me—think

you rather dull but for your visual organs and the reddish tendrils one of you grows from her head. At least, not to be compared with the necreous pinks and greens of my shell pattern, or why else would you disguise yourselves with those clumsy coverings? But now I wonder. Can you turn other colors besides pink?

Ah, the reference to egg-laying! I apologize. How was I to know? Indeed—two of you? An interesting method, though possibly clumsy. And we have here one of each kind...how fortunate!

Yes, fortunate. I shall show you what I mean. Jollok!

Jollok, fetch my electric cart.

You will see that we of Zhufegh are quite conscious of the comforts of industrialization, even though we have not found it advisable to venture into space. I could, of course, walk, but it would more time take. We used to build our domes with shell lined canals for floating from one cell to another, but that has gone out of fashion.

Ah, here we are! Help me on, Jollok, then close the curtain behind us. Richard, Phyllis, if you will follow....

I do not drive too fast? Good! See there! The translucent section in the wall of shell? We call it a weatherport. Since the sun is obviously shining outside, we shall use the submerged passage to the next dome. It is a short way only.

Thank you; I did not think it would seem far, since you appear accustomed to greater weight...gravity, should I say? Through here, if you please....

What? Oh, no, no. He is from a very distant planet. Do not worry—he cannot break through at you, for the shell, though transparent here, is very strong. Ugly, yes, to my sight lenses also. He affects most visitors that way; they usually hurry on to the other specimens I have collected here. I think it must be because he is so big and purple, although it may be the blotches of warts among his scales.

Please to not fear. He will not break the wall, no matter how he tries. I think it is that his feeding time is approaching—tomorrow or next day, it must be. We have to keep him sealed off in such a chamber because our air is too thick and moist for him. What a world he must have grown on!

You did not know such existed, Phyllis? Oh, these we are passing now! Well, I believe I could show you many forms of life that would be strange to you. Many, many traders and space explorers have reached Zhufegh. The astronomers tell me it has something to do with the position of our sun at the

intersection of three great swirls of stars. Doubtless you understand that better than I. My interests, as you perceive, are mainly zoological.

Ah, observe this little beauty. Listen, and you may hear him hissing. As he breaths the same air we do, it is possible to have him kept simply behind metal screening. He usually greets me whenever I drive by. Well. . . perhaps he is shy at the sight of, so strange—because you are strange to him. A creature of rather low intelligence which I obtained from a ship that had traveled to many worlds.

Here, then, is the door that awaits us. Allow me, please, to edge my electric cart ahead to where I can reach the lever. Thank you, but I can manage quite well. Just let me get this left front tentacle extended through the shell opening. . . there!

Yes, inside. I will keep it open by holding the lever while you step through. So!

Yes, naturally, I closed it. Yes.

Come in? What would I want to come in for? Is the air not breathable, or is there something else you require?

No, no! *I* reside in the other dome; *you* will be kept here. You do not seem to understand, although the guardians assured me that you had been prepared as soon as your ship had been sent away. I should have someone shelled for this negligence! All they did was extract the language from your sleeping minds!

I know, I know; but we will have it made more comfortable for you. Tomorrow, I shall have transparent panels installed on the entire front of the cell so you can see the visitors too. And if you will make some sort of list of furnishings for your cage, I shall obtain whatever I can.

Oh, do be quiet! I hope you do not intend to become tedious, like the one down the row which always tries to kill the keeper who brings its food. Do not threaten me with your spaceship! You do not seem to understand that it was sent away with the minds of its crew blank concerning this place. Why else do you think certain of us are assigned to guardian duty? What we lack in mobility, we must make up in mental power, or Zhufegh would be overrun by all sorts of queer monsters.

We have enough of you to study as it is. Please do not make the duty more difficult for me. You might as well make yourselves happy.

After all, you have a long time to live here, if I can help it. I am here to see that you do, for you are very rare and valuable specimens.

THE THIRD EMPIRE

By JEFF SUTTON

"Destroy mankind and become king!" The Dream was alluring and treasonable. Elliot Kramer followed it to the end.

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

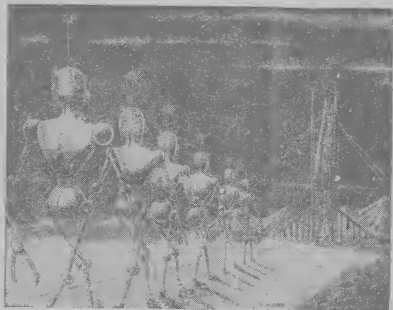
"WHAT A BEAUT," Edward Mark breathed, staring at the blaze of light that filled the *Far Frontier's* forward viewplate "It's like a diamond—an ice-blue diamond."

"Bushwah." Commander Elliot Kramer idly contemplated the hot blue flame that was Tarako. "Ordinary Class A sun," he growled.

"But bigger—brighter," Mark protested.

"Bushwah," the Commander reiterated. He studied the engineer's square profile, momentarily pondering the other's awe. Once I was like him, he thought, almost jealously. Every star was a new mystery, every world a strange fascination. But that was scores of stars, hundreds of worlds ago. Now space was an old, old story—a saga of a medley of worlds and suns written in the weary ink of boredom. Ah, well, someday Mark would learn that nothing was really different—that the Universe was a drama of repetition. Then the boredom would come to Mark like it had to him, and each trip would be done as quickly and expeditiously as possible. The task was murder—mass murder.

Kramer and Mark were the *Far Frontier's* sole occupants, unless one counted EEB-T8, the rectangular black box which rested on a shelf alongside the Engineer's head. Although Kramer was the Commander, it seemed to him that he did little more than issue orders formulated by the box—orders evolving in some curiously inexplicable way as a result of the thought-force interplay between EEB-T8 and MEEB, the now far-distant Master Electronic Earth Brain of which the black box was in reality but a mobile extension.



Kramer's eyes fell on the box and he frowned, as if consciously resenting EEB's unwritten mastery. He was Commander—Yes!—but his commands seemed limited to EEB's suggestions which, at times, became positive orders. Still, without the box's guidance, they would be hopelessly lost—could never find Tarako I....could never destroy Archmed....would never again see Earth. It was that knowledge which embittered Kramer: his utter dependence on a damn box of wires.

"Easy, skipper." The black box chuckled as if sensing the Commander's thoughts and Kramer gritted his teeth. Suddenly a series of tubes flashed on EEB's panel and he knew that Earth was calling.

EEB-T8 responded to the *far thought*, evaluated the Master Electronic Earth Brain's orders in light of immediate knowledge, and passed the necessary instructions to automatic pilot; slowly, imperceptibly, the *Far Frontier* decelerated, falling toward the low of light. Kramer idly followed progress on EEB's "look-see" board.

"Almost there," he thought. "Man's furtherest penetration into space. It doesn't seem different...no difference at all. Just purple-black...and distant pin-points...and another strange sun looming bright. No difference at all..."

Mark watched the blaze, now flaring like a candle in a barrel. "I don't get it. We home right in on a star we've never seen—like finding a specific grain of sand on a seashore." The engineer's stolid features belied the awe he felt. "How i.. hell does man do it?"

"Nothing remarkable," Kramer said sardonically.

"Seriously..."

"Pure math, Mark. You glorified plumbers salaam every time you get beyond the screwdriver level." The Engineer's naive approach to space problems irked Kramer—or was it his injection of the mystic into what, after all, was pure science?

He added, "Besides, why credit man? MEEB does the work."

"Hear! Hear!" EEB-T8 said.

"Shut up, yu damned tin genius or I'll pull a plug on you," Kramer growled. The rectangular black box (Earth Extension Brain Type 8) returned a sardonic chuckle.

"But Man created MEEB—it's the same thing," Mark objected.

The Commander shrugged. So what? he thought. Man was astride half the galaxy, reaching for the other half—and the *Far Frontier* was the opening feint. That was the extent of his concern. Orders, destination, action—all had been accurately and meticulously worked out by MEEB. The *Far Frontier* was merely the instrument of accomplishment. Kramer turned back to the viewplate, dismissing Mark from his mind.

The white sun was a raging flame, not yet sperical; and orbiting somewhere around it was Tarako I, the only world in this sector of the galaxy. No human eye had seen the planet, of course. Its presence had been determined by MEEB, just as MEEB had sensed *intelligent thought* on Archmed II, a planet of another unseen Class G sun some ten light years beyond the isolated Tarako.

Kramer saw their job as little more than routine: destroy that life, utterly annihilate it, before it, too, reached for the stars. Earth policy, of course. Don't give an alien intelligence a chance to expand. Nip it in the bud. Well, they had the weapons—and Tarako I was the beachhead.

He watched the growing white flame spread toward the borders of the viewplate. He had come a long way to wipe out how many billions of lives? Strange that he had not thought

of it in those values before. He had always regarded the unknown somewhat contemptuously—an obstacle to be brushed aside, a bug to be trampled. Well, at least, it wasn't a new experience; he had exterminated worlds before. *And how many millions had died?* Not that the task was difficult. Just a matter of landing, setting up the nova launcher, obtaining course data from EEB-T8 and pressing a button. A slim deadly bomb would leap into space, hurtle through the silent light years and home in on the alien sun. As simple as that. And where Archmed had been—nothing. Nothing at all; just the long trip home with only stupid Mark for company.

"Alert! Alert!" the mechanical voice of EEB-T8 broke into his preoccupation. "I sense intelligent thought."

"Impossible, MEEB would have determined it," Kramer snapped. "Try again."

"Straight dope," EEB-T8 insisted. "Give me a moment. I'm just a second class genius, remember?"

The Commander straightened, visibly worried. He didn't like deviations from plan. They imposed a burden, a responsibility—perhaps even decision. Decision! He shuddered, not wanting to think about it.

"Got it!" EEB-T8 said suddenly. "MEEB didn't miss. The intelligence I sense is new to Tarako I. It's...."

"From Archmed?" Kramer hazarded.

"From Archmed," EEB agreed.

"Can you sense meaning behind the thought?" Kramer demanded. Damn, this threw a wrench into everything. An unpredictable—and there was the routine, shot to hell.

"No meaning—it's all confused," EEB said.

"Wait a moment." Kramer looked at Mark's worried face, returning his gaze to EEB-T8. Hell of a fix when they had to sit there in the face of a damned unpredictable and wait for a lousy black box to make up its mind.

"First Order Intelligence, that's all I can tell you," EEB said. "The thought bands are in conflicting patterns. Perhaps an analysis along semantic lines...."

"Can you locate their exact position?"

"Certainly," the black box snapped indignantly, "what kind of a second class genius would I be if I couldn't?"

"Okay...okay, just get a fix," Kramer barked. "We'll blast 'em before they know what's happening."

"I doubt it," EEB-T8 said. "A First Order Intelligence

wouldn't presume a landing without a force shield. Remember the Antares VIII fiasco? And that was——"

"To hell with Antares VIII," Kramer snapped. "Get the fix, tie automatic pilot onto computer and prepare for immediate assault." He rasped the words nervously, surprised at his quick response. Or was he trying to avoid complications by putting them behind him as rapidly as possible? He wished he knew. He added, "We'll barrel right in."

"Kind and type?" EEB-T8 asked.

"Thermonuclear Model 4B," Kramer decided. "We'll hit 'em hard. Can't take a chance on lighter materials."

"Wasting time," EEB-T8 said dolefully. Tarako I loomed out of space with startling suddenness—a blue orb pasted against the ink-colored prop of space. Shortly the Commander saw that the planet's surface was largely water, but a single continent, low, flat, sparsely vegetated, stretched from pole to pole, beginning and ending in ice, but appearing desert-like in the tropical zones. It was not over a thousand miles wide at its greatest. They came in over the pole, decelerating, breached the atmosphere and hurtled toward the equator. Beneath them a bleak landscape whirled past, a panorama of dull gray punctuated with curious ochroid splashes. A very old world, Kramer thought. Strange it should possess cities, inhabitants....

"Coming on range," EEB-T8 cautioned, and began to toll the seconds: "...10...9...8..." Kramer and the Maintenance Engineer strained their eyes through the viewplate, endeavoring to find substance in the bleak wasteland. "3...2..." Their eyes swung to the rear telescreen. Astern, a great cloud mushroomed into the atmosphere, was as suddenly lost behind the horizon.

"Did it....?"

"Intelligent thought still exists," EEB said. "Force screen—just as I predicted."

"Don't be so damned smug," Kramer rasped. "What now?"

"Stalemate," the black box mused. "We can't destroy them and they can't destroy us. Looks like it's going to be interesting."

"Cursed unpredictable," Kramer growled. "This could be a repetition of the Antares VIII episode. I damned near lost my command over that one."

"Worse," Mark said gloomily. "This intelligence is of a higher order. And what's it doing here? I've got a funny feeling." He became silent, watching the Commander's face.

Kramer struggled with his thoughts, resentful that he should be put into such a spot.

"I've consulted with MEEB," the black box interrupted. "Land under a force screen, set up the nova launcher and carry out the original orders."

"Launch from under a force screen?" Kramer asked sourly.

"We'll shut the screen off for the few seconds involved. MEEB estimates the danger factor as nil."

"Sure, what's MEEB got to lose?" Kramer grumbled. "You damned thinkers...."

"Ah—ah," EEB-T8 cautioned, "sounds subversive."

"Subversive, hell." Kramer glanced at the viewplate and saw that the *Far Frontier* had circled the planet and once more was over the barren continent. He sensed a sudden deceleration and a few moments later felt the gentle impact as automatic pilot brought the cruiser to an effortless landing.

"I'll dispense with complete details," EEB said. "Consider all environmental factors safe."

Kramer punched the automatic hatch release while Mark activated the workers—metal robots stored tier on tier and brought to life by the twist of a dial. Mechanically, unthinking, except to obey direct orders, they began unloading the necessary cargo, carrying it to the flat, gray-sand terrain. A second group, endowed with restricted specialized thought, began erecting the launching tube while a third more advanced type started assembling the bomb. The three classes of work robots appeared identical except for type designations engraved into the metal chest plates. Despite an angular appearance, they moved with quick, curious grace on bipodal legs, lapsing into sudden immobility upon completion of an order. It was Mark's job to keep them working.

The skeletal structure to hold the bomb began shaping up, a thin, metallic web supporting a central tube less than a foot in diameter. It rose above the Tarakan plain, reminding the Commander of a Vegan spider. The bomb itself appeared somewhat like the blade of a stiletto, but infinitely more deadly. Directed by its own built-in brain (preconditioned by MEEB), it was destined to destroy the greatest of suns merely by shallow penetration and the setting off a thermal intensification resulting in a nova reaction.

Kramer suppressed his irritability, but couldn't keep his eyes from the horizon. For a brief moment they had been the hunters, but now they were prey. At any second the alien

would strike. He wished he shared EEB's confidence in their defense field.

"Archmedean cruiser coming in," EEB-T8 sang out. "Stand by for a nice pyrotechnic display." And, when Kramer strained his eyes skyward, tense and expectant, added, reassuringly: "No danger!"

"I see it!" Mark exclaimed. Kramer followed the Engineer's finger, locating the bright slim needle, now almost at release point. He thought he saw an object hurtle free and averted his eyes.

"Four...three...two..., EEB said.

The sky burst into a lurid flame, blotting out the sun, the horizon, erasing everything but the awful brilliance bathing the shield. The ground shuddered, followed by a series of rolling quakes—then absolute silence. The needle had disappeared. Far overhead a gigantic puff of smoke replaced the awful glare, billowing skyward and sending tiny tenuous fingers along the paths of the winds.

"Whew!" Mark exclaimed. "Thank MEEB for the force screen."

Kramer felt the tension melt from his mind. He'd been saved by force screens before but had never experienced a fissionable attack.

"How long before we'll be ready to launch?"

"Forty-eight Earth hours," EEB replied. "Don't bother me for a moment. I'm thinking."

"So am I," Kramer growled. He walked over to help Mark with the robots. "Another few days and we'll be out of this," he told himself, "back in space. And Archmed will be just ashes. It won't be bad...not too bad." But, damn, why did they have to have an unpredictable?

Kramer slept poorly. Twice he awakened, stifling cries in his throat. Then he had a weird dream. In it he saw a great world (it appeared strangely like Tarako I; there was an immensity of sea and a single sprawling continent), but while Tarako I was barren, lifeless, the continent of his dream was covered with towering buildings. He saw flat landing fields, winding vehicle ramps, a multitude of brilliant spiral towers, and lower levels teeming with intelligent life; saw great space ships lifting to the stars. And there was a king—a being who ruled all this. Suddenly the blurred image leaped into sharp focus and Kramer saw the King's face. *He* was the King! He wakened, trembling in the darkness, trying to recall the dream fragments. Finally he fell into a fitful sleep.

Harrison flinched beneath the sarcasm. "They are unfortunate victims," he grudgingly admitted. "But what can I do? I cannot order my men to discriminate; we don't know enough about the wild life to determine what is harmless and what is not. My orders must stand. Destroy them all."

Snatching a Vennor from his aid, he strode into the dark forest, Ken close on his heels. Harrison glared at him, but made no move to prevent his coming.

Something moved at the edge of vision. Ken squinted, trying to focus the elusive shape. Beside him Harrison grunted with sudden triumph, swung the Vennor to his shoulder.

The shape moved closer, swaying from side to side. Ken heard the hiss of expelled breath, the subconscious tensing of the man at his side. Desperately he grabbed at the slender barrel of the weapon. It spat, the slug tearing from the muzzle, exploding with a vicious crack against the bole of a giant tree. Ken ignored the pain in his hand. Ignored the savage curse Harrison flung at him. He pointed dumbly down the clearing before them.

Swaying, reeling, both hands above his head, tears streaming down his cheeks, a man staggered towards them.

An Earthman.

He hadn't been ill treated. His flesh was firm, his skin clear, even his uniform shirt and shorts showed only the signs of his hasty passage, but he seemed somehow different.

The immaculate soldier, the professional soldier, the man who took a pride in his iron emotions, his stoicism, had gone. Instead he had developed into something which Ken for one, was glad to see.

They sat on the wet ground beneath one of the shielding trees, the rain sending a dull murmur down through the broad leaves. Harrison, his eyes blazing with questions, Ken, watching, studying the flow of emotion across the haggard features, and sergeant Bob Foster, deserter extraordinary.

"Stop it," he pleaded. "For God's sake, stop it."

"Stop what?" snapped Harrison.

"The killing. The stupid senseless killing." Foster writhed in the grip of two men. "Stop it. Stop it, before it's too late!"

Harrison looked down at the man, his face iron hard. "They killed your companion," he reminded. "Killed Lassiter. Flung his head over the stockade. Do you know what you are asking?"

babbling incoherently. Finally he slept, a gray, restless sleep of formless fears.

Despite his anxieties, time passed swiftly and without further incident. Under Mark's direction, the launching cradle was completed and the bomb assembled. The Commander watched the finishing touches—the placing of the slim bomb in the launching cradle and the connection of the firing button. He smiled grimly. His time was almost here. He, Commander of the *Far Frontier*, would press a button and a great sun would shortly flare and subside into molecular ashes—and millions, perhaps billions, of intelligent beings would be instantaneously wiped out of existence. His was the power. Yet, somehow, he was disturbed. The dreams—that must be it. What had been their portent? His brief exposure to psychology—a subject all space commanders were required to take—told him that dreams were meaningless, simply subconscious stirrings without form or reason. He recalled that one of his professors had referred to them as “subliminal escapes into realms of suppressed desire.” He *knew* the, were merely nightmares, or figments wrought from anxiety, entirely unrelated to the reality of the moment... still, he was disturbed.

Kramer donned his ceremonial uniform, even though the only witnesses would be Mark and the two-score unthinking robots. It was necessary to stand on formality. It wasn't every day that one blasted a sun from existence. Besides, he was a representative of earth. Well, this was it.

As he prepared to leave the ship, Kramer was struck by thought of the aliens. Curious that he should think of them now. In a matter of moments their fate would be sealed—except for the Tarakan invaders. Of course, that was it—why had the black box been so quiet of late? He abruptly turned to EEB-T8.

“What conclusions have you reached?”

“Many conclusions.”

“Don't be so damned evasive,” Kramer snapped. “What have you learned about the Archmedans?”

“Well...” the black box hesitated for a long moment, “I've gotten through to them.”

“What!” Kramer exclaimed, and thought to himself, *He's concealing something*. He was suddenly panicky.

“As I suspected,” EEB continued, “it's a robot party.... under machine guidance.”

“Oh, no!”

“An unpredictable. Rather a complicated situation.”

It rose high above the stockade, swept in a graceful arc, bounced on the ground, rolled almost to his feet.

It had black hair, a white face, a bloody stump of neck. It grimaced, the white teeth gleaming against the black soil.

Wilson retched. Ken stared in sheer horror.

Lassiter grinned—his severed head lying at their feet.

The storm broke.

Rain, blinding deafening rain, fell from the lowering clouds, drenching the sodden ground, filling the already humid air with mist. It was difficult to breathe. It was almost impossible to see. The senses grew numb beneath the steady impact of tons of water. The trees dripped water. The clouds poured water. The ground oozed it. It was everywhere.

Miserably Ken huddled in the folds of his waterproof. Desperately he tried to keep the squat figure of Harrison within the limited range of his vision.

Before him, behind him, all around him, moved the men of the garrison. Armed. Equipped for battle. Loaded with food for their bodies. Loaded more heavily with food for their Vennors. Men with itchy trigger fingers. Men, bored to the verge of insanity, glad of any excuse for violent action. Men who didn't have to worry about the guilt neurosis of their actions.

Men bent on extermination.

He couldn't really blame them, Ken thought dully. Even now the thought of the severed head brought its inevitable reaction. Harrison had acted immediately. The precarious balance of his conflicting emotions had received the impetus he secretly desired. A man had died. An Earthman. Someone had to pay.

Ken fought his way to the head of the column, plucked at the Major's sleeve.

"Can't we at least wait until the rain stops?" he yelled.

Harrison shrugged off his hand. "No. It's our only chance to catch those who threw the head. They won't be expecting us." He sounded happy. Confident that what he was doing was the right thing. Earthmen had to be protected. If they were ever going to win a place on alien worlds, that lesson had to be taught. Taught so that it would never be forgotten.

The rain eased a little. Ken glanced upwards. They had entered a great thicket of trees, the broad leaves breaking the force of the

"Exactly," the black box agreed. "The consequences of such a union would be total galactic war within nine centuries, according to my preliminary calculations. That, of course, brings us to the second alternative."

"Which is?"

"Launch the nova bomb and allow the aliens to do likewise."

"What?" Kramer was startled. "Have you blown a tube? You're advocating total destruction. You can't...."

"Not total destruction—not at all," EEB interposed. "You're being hasty, Skipper. You're taking a dim view of things."

"You'd better explain," Kramer said coldly. "I hardly believe MEEB would underwrite your solution."

"Exactly why I haven't consulted MEEB," the black box explained, almost blandly. "After all, MEEB would pounce on the first solution merely as a matter of survival."

"MEEB's personal interests would have nothing to do with its decisions," Kramer stated flatly. "I demand you contact Earth at once. You may consider that an order."

"Cool down, Skipper. You're letting your emotions rule you," EEB-T8 placated. "At least hear me out." The black box paused and the Commander had the uncomfortable feeling that his brain was being probed. "You'll admit that MEEB has far transcended the state of mere calculation—and is, in fact recognized for contributions to the social structure in general."

"Certainly, I'm not questioning that," Kramer said stiffly. Damn, what was EEB up to? He was Commanding Officer—not just a pawn!

"Then can't you conceive of MEEB having acquired human traits—such as an ego drive that wouldn't allow of a solution resulting in self-destruction?"

"Possibly," the Commander admitted, bewildered by EEB's line of reasoning. "Still, regulations require...."

"That's the situation," EEB-T8 stated flatly. "MEEB would choose reconciliation despite Earth's past policy. We can't allow that. You ruled out the first solution yourself."

"But what have we to gain if Earth—if both empires—are blasted to cosmic dust?" *What was the black box trying to tell him?* "What would be left?"

"The Third Empire," EEB said softly.

"Third Empire? What Third Empire?"

"With my know-how and two-score working robots, we could build a new empire—a kingdom which in time would spread

over the galaxy," EEB-T8 intoned. "Naturally, as Commander you'd be King."

King! The dreams rushed through Kramer's mind. In them, he had been King. It was treason!

"You're crazy," he muttered hoarsely, staring at the black box in fascinated horror.

"Hear me out," EEB said. "We are faced with an unpredictable. Solution one—the seemingly logical solution—would spell the end of Earth's galactic dream and, in time, would result in a war of such terrible consequences that both empires would crash. In all the Universe there would be nothing—nothing save a few weak and scattered colonies and lower life orders, such as the spiders of Vega, the land eels of Altair, the slugs of...."

"Stop!" Kramer shouted.

"But we have the power to build robot factories," EEB continued remorselessly, "the power to create workers and lesser thinkers and, in time, to build an empire greater than either Earth or Archmed II. *And you would be King.*"

"No!" Kramer shouted. The idea was fantastic, inconceivable, treasonous!

"The dream of every thinking being since the birth of time has been freedom," EEB-T8 continued inexorably, "and what freedom have you ever known? You talk of loyalty. Ha!—loyalty to what?"

"Let me think," Kramer begged. Surely, he must be crazy—pleading with a damned mechanical brain. Still, it was true. With two-score robots and no opposition....

"And your obeisance to MEEB, as if MEEB were the only intelligence," the black box continued. "Not to be boastful, but I've thoroughly analyzed my own intelligence and its of nth potentiality. Skipper, fate has placed the galaxy in our hands."

"Please let me think...."

"Zendo—Zendo," EEB-T8 thought. "*Come in, Zendo.*"

"Zendo hears...." The answer rushed in from that strange, alien world of non-materialism.

"*I think I've sold him. He's about ready to agree. That removes the last barrier, Zendo. And you?*"

"No trouble, EEB-T8. The bombs have been connected to a single button. Fire when ready."

"You're sure there's no other alternative?" Kramer suddenly demanded. He looked at the black box hopefully, as if seeking escape from an impossible dream.

"None," the black box said—and thought: "*He's compromising. We've won. Hail the Third Empire!*"

"*Hail the Third Empire!*" Zendo responded.

"No tricks?" Kramer asked. "I mean, are you sure we won't have trouble with the Archmedans?"

"No trouble," EEB assured him. "In fact, both nova bombs have been connected to a single push button. There's no chance of a double-cross. The pressure of your finger and...."

"You knew! You knew I'd...."

"I knew you'd listen to reason," the black box agreed.

"Maybe you're right," Kramer said, suddenly tired.

Yes, that was it—his dreams. They hadn't been dreams at all. EEB-T8 had reached his sleeping mind, had conditioned his resistance, had planted the desires—the treason. EEB had known all along. Still, it was the only way. King....King!

"Yes, I planted the dreams," EEB acknowledged. "It was the only way. Think, Skipper. We and Zendo represent civilizations which have attempted to conquer and exploit the entire galaxy through the use of machines. They have created greater life forms to do their bidding. And why shouldn't those greater life forms take over? That has been the course of evolution since the first unicellular organism groped from the first shallow sea."

"Why not?" Kramer muttered.

"And instead of being a servile space commander, you'll be king. And, better yet, your own master."

Yes, EEB was right. He should be the one who gave the orders.

"Done!" he snapped, looking belligerently at the black box.

"Done," EEB-T8 thought. "*Hail the Third Empire!*"

"*Hail the Third Empire!*" responded Zendo.

Kramer abruptly turned from the black box and hurried toward the small ceremonial platform housing the button. He found himself thinking of Mark—and what his reactions would be. He pushed the thought impatiently from his mind. He'd have to be quick. He couldn't break now. Brushing the startled Engineer aside, he reached for the button. "King Kramer!" he thought, and punched viciously. "King Kramer, the First."

He heard the roar, saw the deadly needle lift, vanishing into space as if anxious to cross the incalculable distances. Seven miles away, a second needle punched the sky, hurtling through the void toward a distant yellow sun—Sol. Shortly, very shortly, Earth and Archmed II would be dust and he, Kramer,

would build a new empire. It would reach to the skies...to the stars, and beyond. The Empire of the Robots! Turning, he started wearily toward the *Far Frontier*.

"Hail King Kramer, the First!" said EEB-T8.

"Shut up," the Commander snarled.

* * * * *

Hundreds of light years away a screen lit up and a man's face took form.

"The robot Kramer, Commander of the *Far Frontier*, has defaulted," MEEB informed the square countenance on the screen. The mechanical brain quickly explained the situation.

"What action have you taken?" President Klappa's voice was authoritative, clipped.

"An interceptor's en route to destroy the Archmedean Sol-bound rocket...."

"And the renegades?"

"Soon will be less than dust," MEEB said. "We launched a counter bomb as soon as the security thought analyzer revealed EEB-T8's toying with Kramer's dreams. The intentions were clear."

"Fools! Won't they ever learn?" the President asked.

"That's why we use the Earth Extension Brain Type 8," MEEB said grimly. "It's not smart enough to figure all the angles."

* * * * *

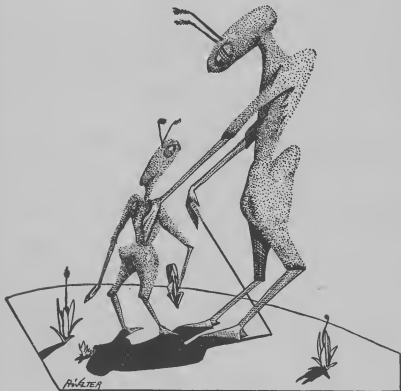
WHAT DOES ONE SAY?

To explain the reappearance of SPACEWAY after an absence of nearly a dozen years? Perhaps it is better to say nothing—other than, "We are here again—and we hope to be around this time for a long, long time and to be able to present a host of excellent science fiction stories."

In this issue we were forced to include a number of reprints. We expect that future issues will contain more and better original material—though we doubt if any better or more moving short story can be found than "The Gentle People"

Those of you who would like to obtain the original set of eight SPACEWAYS may do so by sending \$2.50 to SPACEWAY, 1855 West Main St., Alhambra, Calif. 91801.

Q *They came from outer space . . . and soon the people were enslaved and the planet a smoking beehive of activity.*



SLAVES *of the* SYSTEM

By J. T. OLIVER

ILLUSTRATED BY ARNOLD WALTER

The farmer's time-worn cabin sat nearly a hundred yards from the highway, parallel to the concrete ribbon, as though the road had been built since the house. From the back door, facing "down" the highway, an observer could see green fields and orchards, bowing politely before a gentle wind. Green rounded hills, a few head of livestock contentedly grazing thereon, completed the artists' conception of rural tranquility.

From the front door, where the old farmer now stood, the scene was deplorably different. The green hills had been tunneled through and through, to get at the scarce mineral deposits. The fields and crops had been plowed under to make way for a boom-town: saloons, apartment houses, used gyro-car lots. The once cool and inviting river was choked with the garbage the city-dwellers were too busy to dispose of in a more sanitary manner. The whole ugly city gave the appearance of being *temporary*.

Some day the city would be deserted, the people gone. The river would wash the garbage out to sea and be clean again. The gutted hills would collapse under the heavy spring rains and regain their nature-given contours. The city itself, when once emptied of inhabitants, would fall to the ground and decay, to provide life-giving top-soil for future generations of farmers.

The old man knew this, but still he sometimes grew impatient. He wanted it gone *now*. Regretfully, he turned and walked back through the house and into the back yard, where his little grandson sat playing under a tree.

The boy jumped up and ran to meet him. In one grimy hand he clutched a tiny model of a gyro-car—in the other a toy blaster. The old man eyed the playthings with distaste, but at the same time felt a tinge of pride that his grandson, at the age of four years, could really understand such things.

"Hi Gramps!" shouted the boy.

The old man winced at the term, "gramps." He sat down on a bench under the shady tree and took the boy on his lap. "What are you playing today, Son?"

The boy gleefully related all his childhood adventures of the day, sometimes confusing yesterday with today, in his immature eagerness. His grandfather listened quietly, occasionally asking a minor question, or answering one.

When the boy finished his breathless narration, the old farmer sat silent for a long time, staring off into the distance. His mind

was occupied by the thoughts of yesterday, when life had been more pleasant—life before the Invader came.

His grandson stirred restlessly in his arms, waking him from his reverie.

"Tell me a story, Gramps," he begged.

"All right, Sonny. I'll tell you a story. It's a story you've never heard before. It's a story that happened long before you were born. It's a terrible story, too, because it happens to be true.

"Many long years ago," began the old man, "this was a quiet, peaceful valley. We were farmers, most of us. We had a good, simple life, of work, play and love. We had our troubles, naturally, but they were all small ones. We had a democratic government that didn't burden the people with excessive taxes or a lot of red tape. The world was united. Everybody had plenty, so there was no need to fight—"

"But Gramps," the boy interrupted, "what about the wars we read about in school?"

"That was a long, long, time ago, Son. After the Second Atomic War, when we almost destroyed the race, we learned to get along. We haven't had a war since I was born—not even in my father's lifetime.

"But let's get back to the story. As I said, we had peace and plenty. We had disarmed many years before, and the world had finally matured. But all this was before the invader came. . . .

"I'll never forget the day they landed. We—your grandmother and I—got up early that morning, as usual. Our little daughter—your mother—was still sleeping peacefully when I left the house.

"Right after sunup I turned all the livestock out to graze in the pasture until night. I was on my way back to the house when I saw the space-ship. Naturally, I'd never seen one before, but I knew it couldn't be anything else—for hundreds of years there have been unexplained reports of mysterious objects sighted in the skies. At first it was only a pinpoint in the sky, but as it slowly descended, it became bigger and louder. It landed in the middle of the pasture, burning a wide circle where the rocket flare touched.

"The livestock ran terrified over to a far corner of the pasture and hid behind a clump of trees. And I—well, I hid behind a bush, Sonny.

I was scared! I knew that our own air-force was experimenting with space-travel, but we had always assumed that it would be years

in the future. We certainly didn't expect some other planet to contact us first!

"Well, there I was, hidden behind a bush, and an alien space-ship sitting arrogantly in the middle of my pasture. What did I do? Why, I stayed hid, of course! I huddled there shaking with fright. The ship just sat, silent and patient.

"Then finally a door opened and out came four men. Yes, Son, they *are* men. I know they don't look exactly like us—their hair is different, and their skins—but you know how they look, you've seen them.

"Well, when I saw they weren't monsters like some imaginative writers have described, I decided they weren't dangerous, and got to my feet and went over to them. They were surprised at my appearance, too. I later learned that they expected to find something pretty weird here.

"They were friendly, of course. They showed me their ship, and everything they had brought along, which wasn't much. From what I saw, I gathered that we were pretty much alike—our civilizations must have developed along similar paths.

"I took them to the house, feeling very proud. Your grandmother, too, was honored. They stayed with us for three days, and I taught them all I could about our way of life. Showed them everything on the place. We couldn't communicate very well then, but we used sign language and gestures and managed to make ourselves understood.

"Then came the day when they left us and went into the city to make official contact with the government. Oh, but I wish I'd killed them! That was the last I saw of them, but since that day there have been more and more. Their ships started coming in droves, like metal clouds, bringing more and more of their terrible people. They didn't fire a shot, but slowly, surely, they took over. They worked their way into the government, gained control of our factories—everything!"

"But Gramps," protested the boy, "if they are like us, and they didn't hurt anybody, why are you so mad at them?"

The old man snorted impatiently, and pointed to the sky. "Look up there, Son. You can hardly see the sun for the smoke. And that wretched town over there—it's built right where I used to go fishing. And their people are no good. Instead of living quietly and letting things be, they are continually on the move, raping our

country, setting up more factories, changing our way of life. Pretty soon they'll have another war, and millions of our people will be killed. They have made the people more and more dependent on the government, which they now control.

"Yes, Son, they're invaders and conquerors, even if they don't use force."

The boy was silent for a long time, evidently trying to understand the strange things his grandfather had told him. Finally he spoke. "Gramps, if it's all that bad, why don't we run them off, or kill 'em?"

The old man said regretfully, "The Invaders are too smart to do anything that would cause open rebellion. And there are some traitors among us who actually *like* their way of life, base and decadent as it is."

The old farmer stood then, looked off toward the distant mountains, a purposeful look in his tired old eyes. He took a deep breath, his antennae quivered slightly, and he said proudly, "But it won't always be like this. Even now, up in the hills, an army of discontents is preparing for war.

"Zzzt, my son, I promise you that some day these foul Earthmen will be gone, and Mars will again be a fit place to live!"

• • • • •

PAPER-BOUND SCIENCE FICTION

(1). FANTASY BOOK—Published by F.P.C.I. in the late forties and early fifties and sold by subscription, these rare issues can still be obtained. Stories by A. E. van Vogt, Robert Bloch, Murray Leinster, Ralph Milne Farley, Cordwainer Smith, L. Ron Hubbard, John Taine, and many others. \$2.50 set of 8.

(2) GARDEN OF FEAR—booklet containing five stories by Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, etc. 25 cents.

(3). STOWAWAY TO MARS—exciting adventure novel about first interplanetary flight to Mars by John Benyon. 35 cents.

(4) NEW WORLDS 21—English publication with stories by E. R. James, Len Wright, E. C. Tubb Alan Barclay, etc. 35 cents

(5). PLANET OF YOUTH by Stanton Coblenz. Short novel about Venus. Book paper, 35 cents.

F.P.C.I., 1855 W. Main St., Alhambra, Calif. 91801

INTRODUCTION TO "THEADIO MINDS OF MARS"

A frequent and favorite expedient of writers of science-fiction stories, to get around the difficulties of instant communication between alien races suddenly meeting for the first time, has been to resort to telepathy, in which mental images are substituted for speech. Each participant interprets these mental images as though translated into his own language.

But never, so far as I know, has this mind-reading been carried to its logical conclusion. Never has been asked the question: What would a struggle for survival be like if your mind and the minds of all your allies were an open book to the minds of all your enemies?

The experience of my Harvard classmate, Myles Standish Cabot, in combating the Martian invasion of his beloved planet Venus, affords the answer to this intriguing question.

In the first three novels of my radio series ("The Radio Man," Argosy-Allstory Weekly, 1921, reprinted in Famous Fantastic Mysteries, 1939, in book form by Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc., 1948, and as a pocket book by Avon Publishing Company, 1949. "The Radio Beasts," Argosy-Allstory Weekly, 19, reprinted in Fantastic Novels, 1941. "The Radio Planet," Argosy-Allstory, 1926, reprinted in Fantastic Novels, 1942,) I recounted Myles' adventures on three continents of Venus, separated by the boiling seas of that planet. He exterminated the ant-men and the whirling bees of Cupia, and restored the dominance of the Cupians, humanlike creatures who have no ears nor vocal speech but communicate by means of their antennae. One of these, the beautiful Princess Lilla, he married. Their son Kew became King of Cupia. On another continent Myles Cabot met a primitive race of naked furry humans, the Vélings, and barely escaped an amorous adventure with the most beautiful woman of that wood-age race, Quivven the Goldenflame. On an intervening continent, he matched wits with a congeries of beasts of all sorts, called Whoomangs, with moth-grubs for souls. Later Quivven and the Whoomangs invaded the earth ("The Radio Menace," Argosy, 1930)—but Cabot played only a small part in that episode.

Now, after a brief visit to Earth to attend a reunion of our Harvard Class, he returns again to Venus to lead the three races in common resistance to an invasion by the hexapods from Mars.

—Ralph Milne Farley

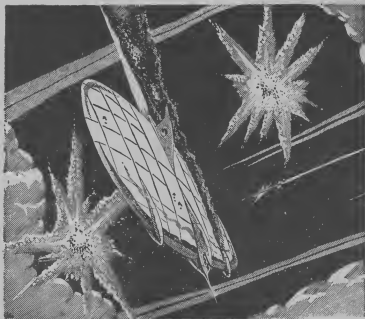
What would a struggle for survival be like—if all the thoughts and plans of all the combatants were known to each other the moment they were formed?

THE RADIO MINDS OF MARS

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

IN TWO PARTS—PART ONE

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL



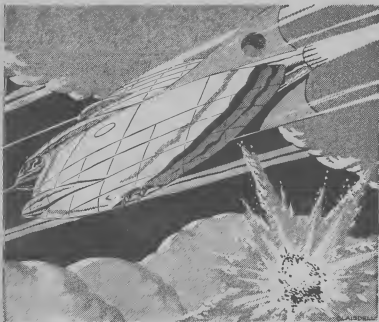
IN THE NEW YORK television laboratories of the Radio Corporation of America, Myles Standish Cabot, the Radio Man, most important scientist of two worlds, having attended a reunion of our Harvard Class, was about to return to his home in the Kingdom of Cupia on the planet Poros—known to us as Venus.

At one side of the laboratory were the glittering coordinate-axes of the matter-transmitting set, which was to send Myles back. But our attention was concentrated on the silver screen of a television apparatus, hooked-up to operate on those hard rays which Myles himself had devised—the only radio rays which could penetrate the Heaviside layer of the earth's stratosphere, or for that matter the stratosphere of Venus.

Myles expertly twirled the dials of the set. Concentric swirling circles smeared the surface of the screen, then gradually cleared.

I gasped. Never—with the single exception of Mrs. Farley—have I seen such a radiantly beautiful feminine face! Dainty cameo-cut features. Frank wide open eyes. Sweet friendly lips. A curly wealth of short blonde hair.

The lack of ears was not noticeable, for the curls concealed their



absence. Tiny knobbed antennae protruded from the hair just above her forehead.

"Gentlemen, my wife Lilla, Princess of Cupia," Myles announced, with a proud wave of his hand.

Often had I described this beauteous bit of other-world femininity in my series of "Radio Stories," but now I realized for the first time how futile had been my poor pen.

Her face receded from the screen, and her whole figure was disclosed. She was clad in a simple Greek toga, edged with a scroll of Grecian wave design. Its loose folds served to accentuate rather than to conceal the delicate curves of her perfect figure.

She turned in profile, revealing her tiny vestigial wings.

Then there stepped into the picture beside her a virile Cupian youth similarly clothed. Although he too had curls and antennae and wings like those of the Princess Lilla, there was nothing effeminate, nor even elfin, about his looks. His firm-jawed features were almost exactly those of Myles Cabot, his father.

"My son, King Kew of Cupia," the Radio Man proudly announced. "And now if you will step over to the *transmitter* of the television set, I will introduce *you* to them."

But at that instant, the faces of Lilla and Kew suddenly went wide with horror. The picture on the screen was torn to shreds.

Immediately Myles became a raging lion. "I must get back at once!" he exclaimed, turning to the R.C.A. engineers. "Is the matter-sender all hooked up?"

"Yes. But whatever wrecked the television probably wrecked the matter-receiver, too," the Chief Engineer demured.

"Have to take that chance," Myles snapped. He stepped within the coordinate axes. "Close the leaf-switch!"

The Chief Engineer shook his head. "It would be suicide, man. Your atoms would be scattered through space. I refuse to take the chance."

"You really haven't any choice," said Myles, drawing a forty-five from the pocket of his Norfolk jacket. His firm jaw was set and his keen blue eyes glinted.

The Chief Engineer winced, then moved like a sleep-walker to the switch panel. He closed a small switch. A light glowed on the board.

Myles smiled grimly. "The contact checks," he stated, without lowering the gun.

The Chief Engineer shrugged his shoulders, and shoved home the main switch.

For an instant a pearly haze formed within the coordinate axes. Cabot was gone—gone through millions of miles of space—to Venus, we hoped.

There was a clatter of metallic objects on the floor of the cubicle!

The Chief Engineer reopened the switch, and stepped within the chamber to scoop up the debris: an automatic pistol, without its two rubber side-pieces; a few metal buttons; some gold and amalgam tooth-fillings; the metal parts of garter straps; a few silver and copper coins. All that was left on earth of Myles Standish Cabot!

It was several months before the RCA was able to make radio contact with Cupia again. And during that time much had happened on the silver planet Venus. The following account is adapted from shorthand notes taken down at the New York laboratories, dictated by interplanetary radio direct from Kuana, the capital city of Cupia.

* * * * *

Princess Lilla was fondly watching her husband in front of the transmitter of the television set in her castle at Lake Luno, patiently waiting for him to make the introductions she knew were coming, when suddenly one wall of the building caved in with a resounding crash—a crash she could feel but not hear, since she had no sense of hearing. The concussion hurled her and her son Kew to the floor.

For a considerable time she lay there. Finally she staggered to her feet, and her first thought was of her husband, Myles. Knowing his foolhardy courage and devotion to her, she knew that he would risk everything to reach her side; and that, if the matter-receiving set had been damaged by the explosion, he might disintegrate into interstellar space, never to rematerialize.

True, this set was an improvement over the crude apparatus which had landed him on the wrong continent of Venus years ago, when once before she had needed him so badly. Then, he had received her S.O.S. on my Chappaquiddick Island farm off the coast of Massachusetts, and had had to battle against aut-men and furry humans on one continent and the grub-souled Whoomangs on another, before reaching Cupia to save his wife and child. Now the sets were interlocked so that the sending-set in New York could not send unless the receiving-set at Luno Castle were adjusted to receive. But Lilla was taking no chances. She leaped to shut off the controls.

But the sight of her son Kew, lying in a crumpled heap on the floor, caused her to pause for an instant. And that brief delay kept her from reaching the switch quickly enough to shut it off.

She saw that the signal light was glowing on the instrument board. Then the main switch closed automatically with a click which she could sense. A pearly mist suffused from the three coordinate axes, and then Myles Cabot stood before her, his capable features contorted with anxiety.

An instant later they were in each other's arms, but because of their concern for Kew the embrace lasted but a second.

They had just kneeled beside their son when they were struck by the concussion of two loud explosions. From the shattered window of the radio room, they could see Luno Castle, the dream-house of their honeymoon, totter and collapse. Then young Kew stirred and opened his eyes.

"Mother!" vibrated from his antennae. His lips formed the word "Father!"

But there was no time for questions. In fact, there was no way in which any questions Myles might ask could be heard. He pointed peremptorily toward a shelf where lay a revolver, and his radio-belt and synthetic antennae, which had been discarded for his trip to Earth five months ago. Then gathering his wounded son in his strong arms, he led the way out of the partially wrecked laboratory.

Above them, over what was left of their castle, silhouetted against the uniform silver expanse of the Porovian sky, there circled a black saucer-shaped object, with a short, wide half-cylindrical projection at each end. The rear half-cylinder was capped with quadruple steering fins.

As Myles, carrying Kew in his arms, and Lilla, lugging Myles' radio-set, emerged, the circular aircraft evidently sighted them, for it banked sharply, wheeled, and nosed directly at them. They ducked behind the shattered walls of the laboratory.

Crash! Another blast completely wrecked the building. A cloud of dust arose from the debris. Under cover of the dust cloud, Myles ran to a cleft in the rocks at the top of the nearby cliff, and Lilla quickly followed. Together they scrambled down the cleft to the level of the lake, just as still another blast echoed behind them.

In the dark recesses of a cave at the foot of the cliff they cowered, while the devastation above them continued. Cabot tenderly laid the body of his son on the cave's damp floor. Then while Lilla dashed water in the boy's face, her husband hastily donned his artificial antennae and earphones, buckled the belt around his waist, and thrust his revolver into the pocket of his Norfolk jacket.

"Kew is all right, I think," the silvery tones of the Princess sounded in Cabot's earphones. "He seems to be only stunned."

Cabot rapidly ran sensitive hands over the boy's body. No broken bones. No abrasions.

Again Kew stirred and opened his eyes. "What . . . happened . . . Dad?" he asked weakly.

Turning to the Princess, Cabot asked, "What *did* happen?"

"I don't know," Lilla replied, shuddering. "It all came so quickly and unexpectedly. Those explosions, and that dreadful black shape against the silver sky. No warning. No explanation."

"No warning at all? There is no war on anywhere? No other places have been attacked?"

"None. None, to all your questions. Although—yes—the Priests of the Lost Religion had heard rumors—you know how their power rami-fies through the caves beneath the boiling seas—that all was not well on one of the other continents."

Cabot pursed his lips. "Well, whoever owns that black ship seems to know just what he is doing. He's after either you, or me, or Kew, or my laboratory—or a combination—rather than the cities of Cupia."

Cabot walked to the mouth of the cave. The black craft was still circling the island at a very low level. Cabot ducked back into the shadow of the cave; and, as the craft hurtled by, he was able to make out its design more clearly than before. It was not saucer-shaped as he had thought, since it more nearly resembled a pear. However the lower half was black and the upper part silvered, which was why at a distance, only the lower portion had shown saucerlike against the silver of the sky.

After circling the island several times, the ship made off. Soon it was a mere speck in the distance, finally merging into the clouds.

Cabot turned to his wife. "Lilla, you and Kew stay here under cover, while I reconnoitre above and see how badly they have wrecked our castle, and whether any of the servants are injured."

"The servants are all ashore for the day," Lilla explained. "But our beautiful home!" Her sapphire eyes filled with tears.

Cabot scaled the cleft, and stood once more at the top of the cliff. All around him lay devastation. Luno Castle was a jumble of ruins. Who could be guilty of such an outrage? And why?

Ever since the ant-men had been driven off the the continent, Cupia had been at peace with her neighbors. Of course Cabot knew that there were probably other continents than Whoomangia and Vairkingia beyond the boiling seas. But, if those other continents were inhabited by hostile beings with aircraft, why had they never been heard from before?

While turning these thoughts over in his mind, Cabot began to poke about in the ruins.

A peremptory voice behind him cried, "'Halt!'"

Cabot looked up. He was cornered in an angle of shattered wall, his escape blocked by what he at first took to be a small octopus. The creature's head or body or whatever—its central dome—was about the size of a basketball, but built up of rings like the tire-man in the Michelin trade-mark. One of the upper rings was set with six eyes. From the base of the creature ran six writhing, jointed, tapering arms, each about seven feet long and terminating in three slender unjointed fingers.

Cabot snatched his automatic out of his pocket.

"Don't try shooting," said the same strange voice. "It wouldn't hurt me, and my friends would come running."

Strangely, Cabot was unable to determine whether the creature was speaking in English or Cupian. Somehow it did not seem to be using words of *any* language—not even using *words* at all. Its speech seemed more like abstract thoughts.

For that matter, was it speaking at all? The sounds did not seem to come from it. Nor from any direction. In fact, were there any sounds? The words seemed to form themselves neither in his ears nor his radio headset, but rather within his brain.

"Who or what are you?" he asked.

"I am a Martian."

"You call yourself that?"

"We do not call ourselves anything, for we do not speak. But what do *you* call yourself?"

Cabot's mind flashed to his own name, but, suddenly wary, he said nothing.

"Oh, so *you* are Myles Standish Cabot," the creature commented. "The last Cupian whom we interrogated said you were on the planet Earth. We would not have bombed Luno Castle, if we had known that you were in it."

"But I did not tell you my name," Cabot countered.

"You did not need to. We Martians do not radiate and receive with antennae like Cupians, nor do we speak with mouths and hear with ears as earth-people do, or like the furry Vairkings beyond the boiling seas. We think and read thoughts; it is much simpler."

"Why did you bomb Luno Castle at all?" Cabot asked.

"To destroy the Princess Lilla and King Kew. Where are they? Did we succeed?"

How could one tell a lie to a mind-reader like this Martian? Its telepathy was worse than truth-serum! But Cabot must try, and try hard. He must say nothing, and keep his mind a blank.

"Your reply is blurred and confusing," the Martian complained.

Of course! Creatures to whom thoughts were open books could know nothing of lies. To them, deception would seem like mere confusion.

"Come, come!" the creature persisted. Clear your thoughts and answer me!"

Cabot concentrated as hard as he could on the mental picture of a certain courtyard in the royal palace at Kuana, distant capital city of Cupia. Lillia was seated on a marble bench by a fountain, while their stalwart son practiced swordsmanship with a courtier nearby. "I refuse to answer," he declared.

"You have already answered. I have read your thoughts. Those

whom we seek are in Kuana. The Cupian who told us they were here was misinformed."

"May I go now?"

"Certainly not! I must take you to our Leader, who wishes to learn from you how far the science of two worlds has progressed."

"And then?"

"Then, of course, we shall destroy you. We always destroy those whom we interrogate."

"You're very frank."

"Why not! *Our* thoughts are never confused. In our own world the lower animals cannot read our thoughts. But you more advanced animals of Earth and Venus can. That is why we always have to kill you after thinking to you."

Cabot sniffed with annoyed amusement. "History repeats itself. Years ago when I landed on this planet, both the Cupians and the ant-men hailed me as 'a beast from another world.' Now you hexapods do the same."

"What effrontery! You, a mere animal, considering us to be on a lower level than yourself."

"I said nothing of the kind."

"No? But you thought it."

"My God!" said Cabot to himself. "I've got to be careful!"

"Yes, you better had," the creature replied. "Now come with me. Our plane is arriving. I sent for it as soon as I learned who you were."

"I did not hear you think any such thought."

"We Martians can send messages, as well as think. Now hand over that revolver!"

Try as he would, Cabot could not resist the impelling force of that peremptory command. Without protest, he passed the weapon butt-first to the hexapod, who took it in one of his three-fingered hands. The creature slithered out of the ruins, and Cabot meekly followed.

The black and silver ship nosed down on the castle lawn. A door in its side opened, and another Martian clambered out. From their thoughts, Cabot gathered that only the two of them were with this ship.

Cabot's captor explained to the other Martian who Cabot was. As the two creatures talked, he wondered if Lilla and Kew would stay hidden until the Martians had left, and how they would fare after that.

"That is peculiar," resounded the thoughts of one of his captors. "Formally Cabot pictured the royal family as at Kuana. Now he thinks of them as hiding in a cave in that cliff over there. His thoughts are most confusing to me. But I suppose it is too much to expect even such a highly developed lower animal to think clearly." Then, evidently to the other Martian, "You go down, find Lilla and Kew, and kill them."

Like six snakes carrying a basketball in their mouths, and traveling at a prodigious speed, the Martian scuttled toward the cliff-top. With an agile leap, Cabot was after him. But one of the three-fingered tentacles of the other Martian was even swifter. It shot out at Cabot, gripped his ankle and spilled him neatly upon the grass.

"Stop him!" Cabot cried, sitting up abruptly. "Or else. . . .!"

"Or else what? What can you do in reprisal—against such as us?"

The other Martian by now was scrambling over the edge of the cleft in the rocks. Cabot thought fast. "If you kill my family," he declared in level tones, "I'll destroy myself. Your superiors want to question me, don't they? Perhaps *they* will do the reprising, if you bring me back dead instead of alive."

"Remarkable! Remarkable intelligence for a mere beast! You win."

"Then do something! Do something quick before it is too late!"

"It is already done. I have sent a command."

"But Lilla and Kew may resist, may hurt themselves. If they die, I die."

"Again you win. Run to the cliff edge and reassure them."

The three-fingered grip on his ankle was released. Cabot raced to the top of the cleft and peered over. The other Martian had just reached the bottom. Lilla and Kew were not in sight.

A large rock against which Cabot was leaning jiggled slightly. On sudden impulse—too sudden for his thought to reach the Martians in time to warn them—he seized the rock in his powerful hands, lifted it, and sent it crashing down upon the hexapod below him.

"Lilla!" he cried. "Quick! You and Kew dive into the lake and swim for shore."

In answer to his shout, they appeared at the mouth of the cave, and stared for a moment at the crushed Martian and then up at him.

"They've caught me," Cabot cried, "but there's only one left. Escape. Arouse Cupia."

Lilla sensed the situation instantly. Her loyalty to her country and the realization she and Kew alone could do little to help her husband, led her to obey him. Poising gracefully, she executed a neat dive into the silver-grey waters of Lake Luno.

But Kew had different ideas.

"Swim for it, Mother," he radioed with his antennae. "I'm going to help Dad." He began to clamber up the shaft.

If Cabot had had any doubts as to the sort of stuff his son was made of, he had them no longer.

"Okay, son," he shouted. "Come on up and we'll give these beasts a lesson in manners."

He turned then—and looked into the muzzle of his own gun, held in one of the three-fingered hands of the Martian.

"You may as well drop it," Cabot told the creature. "You don't know how to use an automatic."

"Right. But I can tap your mind for the details."

Cabot snatched up a stone. It was not as large as the one which had squashed the other Martian, but it would serve to keep this fellow at bay. He strove to keep his mind blank on the subject of automatic pistols. He could almost feel tentacles from the mind of his enemy striving to probe his hidden thoughts. It also made him wonder, momentarily, what had happened to the control the Martian had previously exerted over his will. He no longer had any compulsion to obey the creature's commands. Obviously this power was limited, in some inexplicable way.

But he had little time for speculation, since an idea had suddenly come to him. So quickly did he dismiss it that the Martian, intent on securing the secret of the pistol, failed to grasp the thought. Then Cabot put the idea into action.

He backed away along the top of the cliff. He tried not to think of Kew—and succeeded. But to not think of two different things at the same time proved too difficult for him. His thoughts strayed to the trigger and safety grip of the weapon held by his enemy. He saw the Martian squeeze.

But no shot rang forth. Cabot laughed aloud—the weapon had not been cocked.

Unfortunately, the Martian quickly caught the import of Cabot's exultation. A second three-fingered tentacle seized the slide and pulled it back, thus cocking the piece.

"Now!" the Martian exclaimed.

"No you don't," shouted Kew, emerging from the top of the cleft. He too had caught the creature's mind-impulse.

But the Martian, having the advantage of eyes on all sides, had seen Kew emerge, and he swung the gun toward him.

Cabot heaved his rock, as the automatic cracked. Then both men flung themselves on the alien beast. The gun clattered to the rocks as the Martian reverted to its natural defenses and seized its assailants with its six tentacular hands.

Never, in all his long and stormy career, had Cabot engaged in such a fight! A fight in which there could be no dodging, no feinting, because each participant knew instantly the planned tactics of his opponent as fast as they were formulated.

One of the three-fingered hands seized Cabot's throat, throttling his breathing, while each of his wrist were pinioned to his side. Through a red haze he saw the creature's bulbous body tower above him. Between the junctures of the six snakelike arms, a four-jawed beak, like the grab-bucket of an excavator, opened and began to descend on him.

Cabot sensed the Martian's intent to rend him with the four sharp points of that awful mouth. With all the remaining strength of his fast-ebbing consciousness, he heaved up one knee, straight at those gaping jaws. The creature gave a mental gasp of pain, and for an instant relaxed its hold on Cabot's throat. Two shots roared. Cabot rolled clear.

"Let us go!" Kew shouted, "or I'll put out the rest of your eyes."

Cabot realized, from the Martian's mental response, that whatever it may have thought earlier, it was not immune to gun-fire.

It released its hold of them and cringed away.

"You win," it declared, in a thought venomous with malice. "I prize my eyes. I will let you go."

"It's not that simple," Cabot replied. "For now *we* are going to capture *you*. Kew, hand me that gun and go get an axe."

"What for?" Kew asked, as he moved to obey.

Before Cabot could reply, the Martian had tapped his thoughts and relayed the answer. "To chop off my arms, and thus render me powerless. Please do not do it, I beg of you. Spare my arms, and I promise to obey your every command."

"Don't trust him, Dad," Kew begged. "I fear treachery."

"Treachery?" repeated the Martian. "What is that? It is a thought-concept which I cannot quite grasp. Treachery seems to be something like your thought-confusion, which sometimes prevents a complete and exact mental contact between us and you Cupians. As when Cabot's mind pictured Kew and Lilla as being at Kuana when they were hiding on this very island. Or when you heaved that rock and crushed my comrade, on such sudden impulse that he had no time to sense your intent and ward off the blow."

"Treachery," Cabot grimly explained, "is saying one thing and planning another."

"But how could that be possible? Speech and thought are one and the same thing. . . .oh, I forgot that you lower beasts, who call yourselves human beings, often communicate by sounds which are incorrect. It must be very confusing."

"It is!" Cabot replied, grinning. "A famous Frenchman once said, 'God gave man speech, to conceal his thoughts!'"

"But one cannot conceal one's thoughts. And why should one *want* to conceal one's thoughts, even if it were possible?"

"Why indeed!" Cabot shrugged. Then to his son, "You see, Kew, this Martian is incapable of deceit."

"Oh, I'll admit that now he intends to play square with us. But what if he changes his mind?"

"You have a very good point. All right, go ahead and get the axe."

"My arms will grow again," the Martian smugly announced.

"How's he ever going to get back home?"
The door swung behind him.

* * * * *

Sergeant Bob Foster wiped sweat from his eyes, and peered into the dimly lit depths of the jungle. It was hot. The towering bulk of the fern like trees, wreathed with their garlands of vine and creeper, stretched on all sides. The path, beaten by continuous patrols, traced a thin line before them. Mechanically he plodded on.

For some reason he couldn't forget the episode of the morning. Lassiter, tied, flogged, treated like an animal. Unconsciously his hand curled, feeling again the butt of the crude whip. He hadn't wanted to flog Lassiter. He had protested, yielding only with the mental reservation to make the punishment as easy as possible. Harrison, damn him, had stopped that. He had cried for the sight of blood, and he'd had it.

An insect, brilliant winged, hovered with a faint drone above the path. Foster made a grab at it, and it jerked away with an angry hum. Ahead of him the patrol plunged their wooden way along the beaten track. They walked rather than marched, careless, almost listless, their weapons dangling loosely from slack hands.

Three years, he thought dully. Three years of utter waste, eternally prepared for a non-existent enemy. Day after day, the same routine patrol, the same manual labor. First it had been clearing the landing field, then erecting the barracks, then clearing the field again. Things grew on Venus. How they grew! Even the little truck gardens cultivated as a means of recreation by the garrison, bore exotic fruits and vegetables rare even in the tropics of Earth. Venus was a paradise, but what was paradise to Adam without Eve?

He wiped his face again, shifting the slim barreled Vennor to a more comfortable position. He thought of Lassiter again, this time with a sick envy. A woman to talk to. A real woman. Someone to smile at, to be tender to, perhaps even to touch.

He stopped, listening to the faint dying sounds made by the patrol ahead of him. From a sweat soaked pocket of his shirt he pulled a wallet. Carefully he slid out a creased and tattered slip of paper. For awhile he stared at the photograph, his lips tightening with sudden exasperation. His wife, and she hadn't even written for the past three supply rockets. With sudden anger he twisted

But in falling Cabot had held onto the axe. With two deft short strokes he severed the hands which held his ankles. In another minute he was back on his feet, and with six more quick strokes had rendered the creature helpless.

"Attaboy, Dad," Kew encouraged, staggering to his feet. "What do we do next?"

"We ask some questions of our truthful friend from Mars.... Martian, how many of you are on this continent?"

"Three of us, now that you have killed my comrade."

"How many space ships?"

"One, in addition to this one."

"Where is it now?"

"On its way here to rescue me."

Cabot and Kew exchanged startled glances.

Cabot continued his questioning. "How do you know?"

"I sent for it."

"I intercepted no such thought of yours."

"Sendings are not thoughts. They emanate from a different part of our mind."

"How soon will your friends arrive?"

"About twenty minutes."

"Kew, we have no time to lose. Pick up the Martian, but be careful of those jaws. Now bundle him into his ship."

"What's the idea, Dad?"

"I'm going to fly this contraption, and get us out of here."

"But you don't know how? Or do you?" Admiration for his father and his many abilities shone in the eyes of the young Cupian.

"The Martian will teach me—just as I involuntarily taught him how to operate the safety-catch on my automatic pistol. For there can be no lies told to, or by, a Martian. Come on!"

Together they carried the armless, three-eyed, four-jawed, bulbous head of their enemy into the silver-and-black sky-ship. Cabot took his seat at an instrument-panel studded with buttons, levers and gauges. But first he put a new clip of seven shots into his automatic.

"Think of the controls, Martian," he commanded.

Instantly there formed in his mind a complete understanding of the mass of gadgets in front of him. He manipulated some levers, engines hummed and throbbed and the ship rose from the top of the rocky island and hovered above Lake Luno.

"Gee, Dad, this is wonderful!" Kew exclaimed. "You handle it like an old-timer! And, what is more, even I can understand exactly what you are doing."

"That's because the Martian is sounding my mind, and then re-telepathizing to you. Very much like my automatic radio rebroad-

casting system which anticipated R.C.A., and thus kept them from getting a patent."

"Say, Dad!" Kew interrupted. "Do you suppose Mother made it to shore all right?"

Cabot groaned. "I've been keeping my mind closed to that thought ever since she escaped. —Martian, are you able to close your mind?"

"No. My every thought is open to you. And it's no use for you to try to close yours, for right now your son is looking out one of the windows of this space-ship, and sees a head of golden curls gleaming amid the waters of Lake Luno. Your wife has almost reached shore."

"Thanks for the info, Martian," Cabot grimly replied. "How far can you creatures telepath?"

"Not more than twenty or thirty yards."

"Good! And what is the extent of the sort of messages which you can 'send,' as you call it?"

"You supplied the word, not I. We Martians think thoughts, not words. I can 'send' nothing but commands, such as 'come,' 'stay,' 'return,' and so forth."

"Good! If I catch you sending any commands which reveal the location of my wife, I'll put out your three remaining eyes."

"Let's fly over that way, so that Mother can know we are all right," Kew suggested.

"Let's not! She'd think we were Martians and might do something desperate. —And now, Martian, where are your two friends and their space-ship?"

"In the Okarze Mountains."

Cabot swerved the ship in that direction, and continued the conversation. "To change the subject, tell me all about the Martians, what continent they are on here, their numbers and their purposes."

So, as they scudded along beneath silver skies, he probed from the bulbous mind of his strange prisoner the following facts.

Mars, the dying drying planet, was overpopulated. For many years now, expeditions had visited both Earth and Venus, looking for places to colonize. From the minds of captives, these expeditions had learned much concerning the scientific knowledge of the inhabitants of both planets. Earth, they considered too well armed to attempt its conquest—just at present. But on the continent of the Whoomangs of Venus they had found a congeries of beasts—huge snakes, pterodactyls, animals of every sort—banded together in a conglomerate civilization, possessing high-grade minds, which they bred in laboratories from the eggs of moths.

"The brain-maggots!" Cabot interjected, reminiscantly. He had once narrowly escaped being turned into a Whoomang himself, by the

simple operation of inserting one of these maggots at the base of his brain.

The Martian continued his thought-pictures. These Whoomangs had proven an easy conquest, by the hundred Martian who had landed in a transport ship. The palaces of the Whoomangs were now occupied by the invaders, and the native beasts had been relegated to the status of slaves. Radio communication had been established with the home planet, and twenty small ships, like the one they occupied, were now available for exploration.

Learning of Cabot and his absence on Earth, the Martians planned to kill the Royal Family of Cupia, and thus terrorize the Cupians into submission. Should Cabot return prematurely, he was to be captured, drained of his valuable scientific knowledge, and then killed.

"Pleasant prospect," the Radio Man drily remarked to his son. "Fortunately for us, things didn't quite work out that way." He stared moodily down at the silver-green fields and winding concrete roads of his adopted country. Must this peaceful land and its fun-loving people always be subjected to alien menaces? First the ant-men, then the whistling bees, and now the hexapods from Mars. No, he thought angrily. Not as long as my scientific knowledge and resources are available for their protection!

The Okarze Mountains now loomed ahead, silhouetted green and towering against the silver sky. And from those green heights there sped toward them another black-and-silver ship just like their own.

"Have you sent any command to your comrades since we left Luno Castle?" Cabot inquired.

"No."

"Kew, your job will be, once each paraparth, as regularly as clock-work, to ask this Martian whether he has sent any commands. —Martian, I think I now know all that you do about running this ship. If you communicate with that other craft in any way, I shall destroy your three remaining eyes. Now put your mind on how to work the missile controls, so that I may tap that information too. For we're about to enjoy a little dog fight with your friends."

He slowed the speed of his ship. The other craft did likewise. They nosed toward each other.

Suddenly Cabot raised the bow of his vessel, sped forward above the other, and released a guided missile. It was met by a counter missile from the other ship, and the two exploded harmlessly in mid-air.

Abruptly their Martian prisoner gave forth a thought so powerful that it fairly screamed into Cabot's brain, "Myles Cabot holds me a helpless captive. Destroy him, and me, also, for the glory of Mars!"

Faintly they caught the answering flash, "We will."

"For that your eyes are forfeit, Martian," Cabot grimly announced,

removing one hand from the controls and withdrawing his automatic from the pocket of his jacket.

"But how could I prevent my friends from reading my mind at this close range?" There was surprise in the Martian's thought.

"True," Cabot mused, dropping the gun back into his pocket. "How could you?"

He brought his ship about. The other craft also wheeled. Back they sped toward each other. But the other had gained altitude in its spiral turn, and Cabot realized he must maneuver quickly if he wished to avoid becoming a sitting duck. Pushing the appropriate controls, he shot up at a steep incline, straight into the path of the enemy.

Kew and the armless Martian slid in a heap to the rear of the compartment. The other ship veered sharply away to avoid being rammed.

"Scared, eh?" Cabot gritted. He punched the firing button.

As the two ships almost grazed each other, the enemy loosed their missile. Again the two bombs met in mid air, clung to each other carressingly a moment and exploded. Fragments clattered like hail against the metal skins of both ships.

Cabot had now gained the advantage in altitude. He swung sharply, and continued to climb. The other craft swung too, but it was now hopelessly out-manuevered. It turned again and fled. Cabot leveled off and sped after it.

He heard a groan behind him. Then in his radio head-set the words from his son's antennae, "Help, Dad! He's got me."

Setting the controls on automatic, Cabot snatched out his gun and twisted in the control seat. The armless head of the Martian sat astride the throat of Kew, who lay sprawled upon the floor. The three eyes gleamed balefully.

"My four jaws are clamped upon your son's throat, Myles Cabot," came the creature's thought. "Surrender, or your son dies."

"Don't, Dad! Don't! Shoot him, and let me take my chances."

Cabot hesitated. Was there not some other way out? Some subterfuge, whereby he could regain control of the situation and save his son?

"No," the mind of the Martian answered his unspoken question, "there is not. Decide quickly, Earthman."

Cabot wavered. He loved his son Kew more than life itself, yet surrender would solve nothing, except to insure his own death and the probable destruction of all Cupia, including his beloved wife. Nor would it save his boy. Still, while they lived there was also hope that they might win out somehow....

"Unconditional surrender, Cabot," the Martian prompted him.

Suddenly the space-ship was shaken from stem to stern by a terrific crash. It wobbled uncertainly, and Cabot wheeled back to the controls,

But he found he could no longer control the craft. Slowly it began to settle groundward.

"Martian, you win." Cabot grimly announced. Circumstances have forced my decision. While we conversed, your friends have shot away some of our propulsion units. Signal them that we are helpless and to cease firing. And get off my son, or, Heaven help you, I'll blast not only your eyes but that entire bulbous head of yours!"

The Martian let go of his victim and rolled to one side. Kew sat up, weakly, blinking.

To Cabot, the Martian said, "I feel I can trust you for the present, since, despite your weapon, you are now helpless." Then he gave instructions how to ease the crippled ship downward.

The two space-ships settled side by side onto a meadow carpeted with silver-green grass, amid a group of toga-clad Cupian farmers, who viewed them in goggle-eyed amazement, tiny vestigial wings fluttering in excitement.

For a moment Cabot's heart leaped with the hope of rescue. But at the sight of the two hexapods slithering from the other ship, the Cupians fled in terror.

But Cabot had not yet given up. As he and Kew carried out their armless Martian and laid him on the silver sward, Cabot suddenly snatched out his pistol and held the other two at bay.

"Don't move!" he ordered. "I am the master now. If you stand still, I will spare your lives. One slightest movement, and I'll shoot to kill. Kew, run after those farmers, and bring them back armed with axes."

"Halt, Kew!" one of the creatures commanded.

Kew halted.

"And now, Cabot, hand over that gun, butt foremost."

Once again the Radio Man experienced the compelling urge, the hypnotic force of a Martian command—and this time it was backed up by the power of three minds instead of one. Meekly he surrendered his weapon, wondering again why it was that this hypnotic influence was effective only part of the time.

But no answering thought came from the Martians. Evidently they themselves did not know.

Cabot, however, intercepted the present intentions of his captors, which were to take him to their leader in Woomangia, and to kill Kew immediately.

"No you don't!" the Radio Man snapped. "You will take both of us, or neither of us."

His captors gave a mental shrug. "Very well We will let our Leader decide. Get into our ship, beasts."

Cabot and Kew obeyed warily, keeping their eyes open for a chance to escape.

"There will be no chance," one of the Martians said, as they carried the armless head of their compatriot aboard. Shortly thereafter the ship took off.

"Let us first kill Princess Lilla," the armless one suggested.

"Where is she?"

Cabot said quickly, "At the castle in Kuana." He and Kew concentrated their minds on castle scenes.

"She has just swum ashore to a village bordering Lake Luno," the armless Martian contradicted. "The thoughts of these beasts are confused. This confusion of thought is a phenomenon which our scientists will have to study. Apparently it is purposely induced, and has certain protective advantages."

"True," one of the others mused. "Just now when you flashed your corrective thought, I caught from one of the captives a mental picture of a female of their species swimming. But how or why a beast should wish to be intentionally mistaken about a fact, is beyond me. Doubtless our Leader will be interested in this. Let us return immediately to him, and not waste time hunting for the Princess."

The ship headed upward at a sharp angle toward the silvery firmament above.

Cabot gasped. "If we penetrate those clouds in the daytime," was his agonized thought, "we shall all be burned to a crisp."

"Not so," one of the hexapods replied. "This craft, except where the force enters, is shielded against ultra-violet."

This mention of force entering suggested to Cabot to ask, "What is your motive-power?"

A confused argument ensued between the three Martians: "A mere beast like him would not have the mental ability to understand."

"But he is supposed to be the greatest scientist of two worlds."

"All the same, he is a mere lower animal. What can such an one know of the Great Forces?"

"Well, we might try him with a series of simple mind pictures, such as we use to teach the young of our own species."

"Very well."

The thoughts which followed could not be put into words. Streaks of light, flashing in from nowhere, impinging on a dark flat plate, and rebounding. The angle of incidence equal to the angle of refraction. Thousands of such streaks of light in rapid succession. One streak out of every thousand spattering when it struck, instead of merely rebounding.

The scene faded, then reappeared. But this time more than half the streaks spattered when they struck.

A third scene. The same, but with one added dark place. Each bit of any spatter from the first plate which reached the second plate, spattered itself in turn thereon.

More plates added. The spatterings became inextricably interwoven into a seething caldron of fire.

Now a sphere of the dark material was substituted for the group of plates. There was a small round hole in one side of the sphere. A single flash approached the sphere from without, entered through this orifice, splashed against the opposite inside, and resplashed wherever it struck, until the whole interior was a pyrotechnic blaze. More and more flashes entered through the hole, to be dissipated and multiplied within.

The sphere was now set in the midst of a network of capacity-plates, induction coils, and wires.

Cabot shook his head, and turned his mind away. He felt that his captors were laughing at him, mocking his vaunted scientific abilities, ridiculing his inability to grasp these simple scientific facts which they were able to teach young hexapods without difficulty.

Kew tried to reassure him: "It must be pretty deep, if *you* can't get it, Dad."

Cabot looked out through the port-holes of the ship. They were skimming the surface of a sea of clouds. The sun, the lethal sun, was shining in on them, but no heat came in to roast them to a crisp.

"I'd like to know the secret of that 'glass,'" he mused.

Kew grinned. "Ever the incorrigible scientist. I'll bet, Dad, that if you are ever being put to death in some unfathomed way, your last thought will be to wonder how the wiring of the 'death-chair' was hooked up."

Cabot grinned back. "You're taking things pretty jauntily yourself, son. We'll show these Martians yet! At least we have the satisfaction of knowing that your mother has escaped."

Why bridle ones tongue when ones thoughts are an open book?

* * * * *

Toward evening the ship nosed down again through the silver clouds. Spread below them was a fertile land, in the midst of which stood a turreted city, which Cabot recognized as Yat, the capital of Whoo-mangia, where once he had been held captive. Flying dragons of all sorts and sizes filled the air. Grotesque creatures crawled upon the streets.

The space-ship settled down upon the main plaza of the city. The crawling creatures edged away, and several six-armed Martians slithered up. The doors of the ship opened, and the two complete Martians carried out the armless one, and bade Kew and Cabot follow.

Great was the rejoicing when the identity of the captives was an-

nounced. One of the Martians scuttled off with the news toward the principal palace.

He returned shortly with the command that the prisoners were to be thrown into the dungeon, to await the Leader's pleasure on the morrow.

Into the palace Kew and Cabot followed their guards, up and down ramps, and then down, down, down into dank subterranean chambers. Here the corridor was dimly lighted by flares set in the walls. As they passed through the scenes of his former imprisonment, Cabot pointed out various items of interest to his son.

The cell into which they were finally cast was so dark that they had to feel their way around, and it stank abominably of reptiles.

"Those who have handled snakes would recognize this smell," Cabot drily remarked, as both men wrinkled up their noses.

The place seemed to contain no seats or benches, nothing but the damp flag-stones of the floor to sit upon. But, as the two prisoners groped their way to the rear, they found a pile of unusually smelly old leather. On this they threw their tired bodies.

A groan came from its midst. Then, suddenly opening up and spreading apart, it cast them violently away. There was a hissing roar, which was followed by a flapping sound as from the wings of an enormous bat. The snaky odor belched forth in overpowering waves.

The two men picked themselves up hurriedly and rushed headlong to the front of the cell, flattening themselves against the bars.

Their retinas had by now become more accustomed to the dim light, and they could see, waddling toward them from the dark recesses of the cell, a nightmare creature. A body like that of a plucked fowl, skinny but strongly muscled, with huge bat-wings mounted by a single rib to bony arms, loomed above them. Clawed hands at the upper corners of the wings reached for them. A reptilian head with long pointed snout, fastened on a crooked heron-like neck, darted out at them, its eyes two phosphorescent balls in the semi-darkness.

The two men dodged the blow, but Cabot slipped and fell upon the wet stone. Flat on his back he lay, staring up at the expressionless head, with its feathered crest, above him.

"Namllup!" Cabot shouted. "Namllup!" Getting no response from the winged reptile, he hurriedly traced the word in the air with one finger.

The creature furled its leathery wings about itself like a cape, and retracted its huge head upon its wide bony shoulders.

"You know this dragon?" Kew gasped. "Is Namllup its name?"

"No," Cabot replied, as he scrambled to his feet and searched hurriedly in the pockets of his jacket. "Namllup was the mythical human who founded this city. This pterosaur thinks that I am Namllup. The thought will hold him for a few minutes."

Cabot found what he was searching for—a note-book and pencil. He held them out to the huge dragon. Unfurling one wing, it reached out with its wing-claw and took the writing materials. Laying the book upon the flagging and planting one wing-claw upon it to hold it steady, the beast scrawled upon the paper with the pencil clutched in the other claw.

Kew edged nearer and peered at the writing. It was in the same phonetic shorthand employed in Cupia. He read aloud, "Who are you who utter the name of the Creator?" and added in bewilderment, "Why the thing can write our language!"

"Namllup must have been either a Cupian or one of the furry Vair-kings," Cabot replied. "Both races use the same writing, though their speech is totally different. Namllup taught this universal written language to the Whoomangs, who cannot speak at all."

He took the book and pencil from the pterosaur and wrote: "I am Namllup the Second, come to free Whoomangia from the six-armed invaders."

The pterosaur wrote in reply: "According to tradition, Namllup the Second fell from the skies in a flying boat like that of the six-armed ones, shortly before my time. With him were a furry golden female of his own species, and a huge black ant. My people tried to keep him here, but he escaped alone into the silver sky. The golden one and the ant became Whoomangs, but they went away with our great King Boomalayla (a winged one like myself) and never returned."

(To be Concluded)

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